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MARGARET STEYNE.

A Romance of the New Virginia.

BY

MARTHA FRYE BOGGS.

SECOND EDITION.

NEW YORK:
G. W. Dillingham Co., Publishers,
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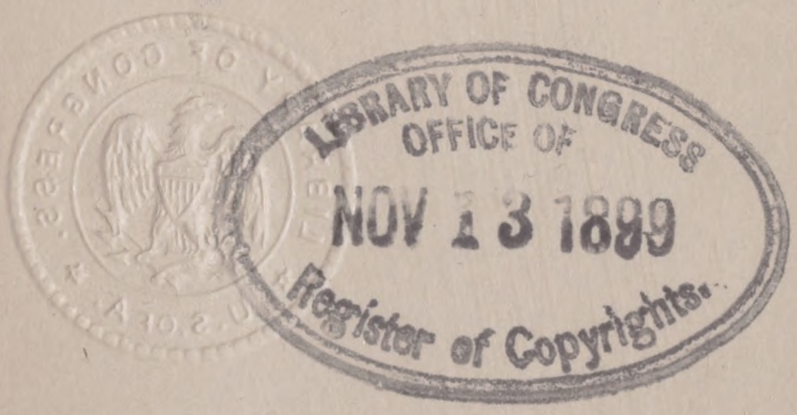

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A ROMANCE OF THE NEW VIRGINIA

A ROMANCE OF THE NEW VIRGINIA.

CHAPTER I.

THE LAWYER'S VISIT.

In the wane of the afternoon of a spring day a young woman stood framed in by an old-fashioned casement, and gazed aimlessly down the street. It was a narrow, unpaved street with irregular flagstone walks on each side, and in its suburban freedom it wandered like a vagrant lane.

It was a quiet neighborhood; and the stillness was unbroken except for the voices of a group of small negro boys who played at mumble-peg on a vacant lot beyond, and disputed in shrill tones over their turns. A flock of swallows, with swift pointed wing, swooped by in spirited flight.

It was when her eyes had followed them into space against the arch of dull blue sky, and come back to the dreary foreground, that they rested on the figure of a man standing in front of the house on the opposite side of the street. He did not belong to the village, Margaret Steyne knew. His manner, as well as the fashionable make of his clothing, proclaimed him a stranger to Winston.

"Tell me, Miss Price, who can it be?"

Margaret turned her shapely head half round as she asked the question, then remembered that she was alone.

The stranger stood looking about him in a perplexed and uncertain way, as though not quite sure of the locality in which he found himself. But uncertainty ill suited his temper, and with an impatient shrug of his shoulders he turned and beckoned imperatively to the group of negro boys, who had ceased their play to watch him.

In answer to his summons the boy nearest scrambled precipitously down the bank, in peril of coming to pieces were it not for the staying qualities of the twine braces and hat-band which he wore. But in fair condition and good time he arrived at the stranger's side, listening to the words of the man with a pleased grin on his face, a face which seemed by some freakish condition of nature to have been placed on the wrong side of his head.

As they stood thus, the man in the dignity of his respectability, the boy in his tattered independence, it was a realistic bit of effect in the dreary monotone of the street. Then it was over for Margaret Steyne; for the boy, in response to some words of the stranger, raised his hand and pointed straight at her, and the stranger had crossed the street, stepping with cat-like tread over the wet places,—for the red Virginia clay was damp and sticky,—and was coming up the short jonquil-bordered walk to the door of the cottage, before she had recovered from her surprise sufficiently to realize that she was to have a visitor.

The web of fate which held inwoven the woof and

warp of Margaret Steyne's life was unfolding with rapid movement down the path which her feet must tread. Did some prophetic thought whisper that the coming of this man was aught to her?—that his visit was to influence her whole after life?

The echo from the clang of the metal knocker, which the man used vigorously, died away, yet she stood irresolute. She felt that she shrank faintly from meeting this stranger, and she did not understand the feeling.

She half turned from the window, but glanced back at the little negro boy in the street. It was a simple, natural scene, a pantomimic ebullition of joy too deep and real for repression. With bulging eyes he looked at the coins that had been given him, shifting them from one hand to the other, till at last, with an ecstatic wriggle of his whole body, he thrust the money into his pocket, threw outward the palms of his hands, then down on the ground went the round, woolly head, and two small, black feet stood firmly upright. Two flat brown soles looked for a brief space straight up at the sky; then, righting himself with a whoop of delight, he sprang away down the street to join his companions, who hovered expectant like a flock of predatory crows in the near distance.

Then Margaret Steyne, impatient of the absurd fancies which had for a time dominated her and caused her to forget the grace of hospitality, stepped to the door, and opened it squarely on the back of the visitor as he stood on the step and looked out on the street. He swung himself impatiently round, facing her with a trace of annoyance showing in

his countenance, but it was with the manner of a gentleman that he lifted his hat deferentially and inquired for Miss Steyne.

"I am Miss Steyne," she replied with quiet dignity. "Will you walk in?"

A glance keen and critical flashed from the eyes of the man sweeping from head to foot over the woman before him; then he bowed and stepped across the threshold, and the small room looked smaller for his coming into it.

After he had introduced himself as Lawyer Harris, of Richmond, he accepted the seat Miss Steyne offered him, though he lost no time by doing so, for he continued speaking uninterruptedly, going straight to the business he had in hand.

"I am an attorney," he said. "For nearly twenty years I was counsel and agent for your cousin Henry, the late master of Steyne House, at Walsingham, Virginia. I came to-day to inform you of his death, if you have not already been made aware of it, and to acquaint you with the fact that you are his heir. You are the nearest living relative, if not the only one, and so inherit the old Virginia homestead and plantation where Henry Steyne was born, and where he lived till his death. It is the original home of the Steynes in this country, and has been in possession of the family for more than a century."

While the bearing and language of the lawyer was that of a well-bred man, his voice, which was strong, was careless in its strength to brusqueness, almost to impatience his listener thought, and his manner said distinctly, I am telling you something;

please give me your attention and you will not need to ask questions.

Miss Steyne felt that in this interview it was extremely unlikely she would be given an opportunity to ask questions, did she desire to do so; for the lawyer continued speaking.

"The formalities of the business are few, and can be attended to at any time. You can take immediate possession of your estate, if you so desire."

He communicated the information as though glad to have done with it. He seemed strangely unwilling to talk more than by reason of his legal connection with the estate he was compelled to do. In the same brief manner a day was set when he would come to escort her to her newly acquired estate, and she would be given formal possession of the home of her ancestors.

The railroad schedule was briefly discussed, and Lawyer Harris had bowed himself out of the room and gone before Miss Steyne had pulled herself out of the mental daze into which his visit and his most surprising communication had plunged her. She stood for some moments just where she had stood when the lawyer left the room, drawing long breaths, and clasping and unclasping her hands in a childlike fashion, the while, as she was sure to do when excited or moved by some strong emotion.

"Is it I, Margaret, or some one else?" she at last exclaimed, giving herself a slight shake. Then she laughed a little nervously, and going over to the window threw it open and let the soft spring air ruffle the brown hair on her forehead, till it took on

strange copperish glints in the light of the rose-tinted sunset.

A man wearing a light topcoat was crossing the main street from the hotel. It was the lawyer, going to take the evening train to Richmond, as she saw when she looked. The sight steadied her. It was real enough, what had happened; what he had told her was true. She closed the window, and going back to the hearth pushed the smouldering logs into a heap, for it would be chilly when the sun went down and the white mists rose over the flats.

A folded newspaper lay on the table where the lawyer must have placed it. She took it up and turned to the date. It was a Richmond paper, with the date of a week ago. In it she found this brief notice:

"DIED: At his home, Steyne House, near Walsingham, Va., Henry Steyne, in the fiftieth year of his age. He was the descendant of William Steyne, of Colonial fame, and was the last male descendant of an old and honored family."

"The last!" To us all there is a sad sound in the words, saddest of all when it is the extinction of an old family name; and Margaret felt a tender sorrow rising in her heart for this cousin who had been her nearest of kin, yet whom she had never known. There had been a tragedy in his life which she had never understood about. She only knew that some sorrow had come upon him when he was a young man, which, it was said, had caused him to retire to his quiet Virginia home, where he studiedly had shut himself away from his friends, as well as the world, and where for more than twenty years he had lived almost the life of a recluse in the large

house with only his two old servants and his books for companions.

But the master of Steyne House had not isolated himself entirely from the world, nor from all friends, as was commonly supposed. For Lawyer Harris, of Richmond, came to see him several times during the year, often remaining a day and a night with him, rarely longer; and he it was who superintended all Henry Steyne's business affairs and managed his investments, becoming finally the only connecting link between the lonely man and the busy, restless world.

The lawyer was on his way back to Richmond.

Margaret Steyne sat in the gloaming, with an introspective look on her face. She was going back over her past life, with its shadows and its sunshine. Bit by bit, as an imperishable mosaic, it lay spread out before her to-night. Her father had died before she could remember, and she was but ten years of age when the lovely, gentle mother whom she idolized was called from her; thus had dark shadows fallen early athwart her life.

When Margaret became doubly orphaned, she was sent, as her mother had desired, to a Northern seminary, which merited well the reputation it had gained as one of the foremost institutions in our land. For six years she had remained a pupil at this school; and, though she was lonely and sorrowful for a time, it was her only home, and she grew to love it. Now, as she looks back upon the years passed there as a pupil, they seem to have been among the happiest of her life.

She had no home, no kindred, no one who belonged

to her; and these she craved with all the strength of her warm, loving nature; longed for them as she longed for nothing else. It was this pitiful feeling of aloneness that kept her from being quite content with her life.

"There is ever something between us and what we deem our happiness."

One wise man wrote the words. We all prove them true.

It had long been Margaret's intention, when she should leave school, to return to Virginia that she might look up an old friend of her mother, Miss Rebecca Price. But here again fate held her in its inexorable grasp. North and South were at each other's throats, and fierce and bitter was the struggle. All travel had long ceased between the two sections. Only those who rode, and fought, and shot, braved the danger line between North and South. With tramp of horse and roar of guns, the brave men of both armies were swaying that blood-red line to and fro, as the sea wind sways a ship's sails.

For five years longer Margaret Steyne remained at the seminary, a member of the faculty where she had so long been a pupil; for, on the close of the conflict, the ways of travel were not at once restored. But as soon as practicable, notwithstanding the dreary desolation that lay like a death-mask over fair Virginia,—and nowhere else did the conflict rage so fiercely,—Margaret carried out her long-deferred plan and came to Virginia to find the friend of her mother. She came straight to Winston, and from the friendly host of the hotel she learned that

Miss Price was still a resident of that place. She learned, too, that her friend was not in the comfortable circumstances she had formerly enjoyed. All here in this valley had suffered the stern fortunes of war, Rebecca Price with the rest, and from what had been a handsome fortune she had saved only the small house on the edge of the village, in which she now resided.

Miss Price, born on a New England farm, had lived there till she was twenty six, when she went to Virginia to take charge of the home of her brother, who was unmarried and a prosperous merchant of Winston. This brother had died some ten years before this story opens, and Rebecca, his nearest relative, succeeded to his entire property and interests, and having become attached to the people, she continued to reside in Winston, where she was highly respected.

Rebecca Price had a strong, decided face. There was not a vague line in it, and it typified her nature. She possessed all the practical self-reliance common to the New England people ; and in the trying times through which she had lately passed, she found pressing opportunity for the practice of all the capability, resolution, and courage with which she was endowed. She was now fifty years of age, a woman of few words and many angles, but with a heart as true as steel.

This was the woman to whom Margaret Steyne had come, and who, she laughingly declared, had given her a mixed welcome, yet the sweetest she ever heard ; for, on learning who her visitor was, she had exclaimed, "I'm mighty glad to see you," which was

Southern, and "I reckon I be as glad to see you as if you were my own sister," which was New England; and when this large-hearted woman, with a warm clasp of the hand, reached out and drew Margaret across the threshold of her humble home, she did for the lonely girl what no one else had ever done; she gave her a glimpse of home-life, a life so restful and unrestrained that it filled her with a new sense of the joy of living.

To Margaret, whose whole life had been passed in the trammeled publicity of a boarding-school, this taste of fireside home privacy, this sweet, restful refuge from a world's daily criticism and its daily demands, was a blessed haven where she would anchor her bark for a long, peaceful rest. She had a small annual income of which she could be certain, and she and Miss Price planned to live together.

"There is strength in union and courage in numbers," Margaret had said cheerfully.

"A good motto to inscribe on our banner," suggested Miss Price; and this suggestion bore fruit.

It was but a few days until this motto looked down upon them from the wall over the fireplace, in beautiful old English text. Another day Miss Price brought in a horseshoe, which she had picked up in the road because it would bring bad luck if you passed it by. In pretended deference to Miss Price's assumed superstition Margaret seized upon it, and nailed it over the door inside the small parlor.

"It's wrong side up," exclaimed her friend grimly; "your luck will fail."

"You are wasting breath, Rebecca. You cannot detract from my serenity of mind. Let it hang

which way it may, its very presence induces faith in its powers to exorcise witchcraft and to stay all evil influences from our dwelling. I feel safe to revel in my freedom," she declared merrily.

The sweet, bonnie face of Margaret Steyne, with its laughing bravery and its splendid spirit, warmed the heart of the old maid into the first approach to a hopeful happiness that it had known since the leaden years of war, with their burdens and despairs, had come upon her, and her heart overflowed with thanksgiving to her Heavenly Father for this her dearest and best blessing, Margaret.

Here in Miss Price's modest but comfortable home the two friends had lived happily for two years. And here Margaret's good fortune had come to her. Unknown to her, out on the wide ocean, a ship was sailing, sailing to her; and, while she slept, unheralded and unwatched for it had stolen into port, the white-winged messenger of fate, and she was waiting now before the fire for the return of her friend (who had gone to sit with a sick neighbor), impatient for her coming that she might share her great happiness.

Twilight had fallen softly and restfully. Dim shadows loomed up now where a moment before there were none. The wood fire on the hearth, flushing into a warm glow, burst into spikes of rushing yellow flame, which threw a flare of light over the form of the lone dreamer by the fireside.

Margaret Steyne was called a beautiful woman. She was not only beautiful, but, what is more rare, she was a harmonious woman. Eyes and voice and

face and movement seemed perfectly attuned to the slight willowy figure, which was just above the medium height ; but her slimness and a certain graceful poise of the head gave her the appearance of being taller. The brown hair drawn back and knotted high on the head rebelled in little waves at the sides, a few short locks touching mutinously the white forehead. Between the straight patrician brows there lurked vaguely and illusively a short faint line which showed only under some strong emotion ; and below her brows shone her glorious brown eyes, soft and luminous as stars, with heavy lashes, much darker than her hair, that seemed to weight down the white lids. Beautiful eyes they were ; and they looked fairly at you when she talked, a peculiarity always noticed and remarked by strangers ; and Margaret Steyne was a woman whom one meditating an underhand action would not look in the face. She possessed a strong sympathetic personality, which impressed itself unconciously upon others, and was in a way responded to by the least imaginative and least impressionable people.

She never seemed conscious of the power she possessed over people ; power which in a vain woman would have been dangerous. But Margaret was without the weakness of coquetry, and strangely indifferent to the admiration of men. Yet it is for such women that men do their bravest deeds and their maddest.

Margaret Steyne looked in the firelight, with a soft smile just touching the sensitive mouth, for she dreamed once again of a home of her own. Dreams, which had always seemed but a vague, far-off pos-

sibility, were vague and ephemeral no longer, but were fast shaping themselves into a tangible, evident reality. Just what kind of an inheritance had come to her she did not know. It lay in that part of Virginia where contending armies had made waste and desolate so much that was beautiful. It might not be habitable, but she meant to make a home of it if that were possible; and it must be, she told herself courageously. She had now an object, something to work for. Her life would never again be purposeless. Did she need an inspiration, it was coming to her out of the gloom born of the twilight. Rebecca Price was coming up the walk. Margaret opened the door.

"Come in quickly, Rebecca," she exclaimed with sweet imperiousness, seizing her friend by the arm.

Miss Price glanced apprehensively over her shoulder.

"Why, there is no one after me, is there?" she asked a little startled.

"No, no; but I want you, Rebecca; I have been so impatient for you to come; I want to tell you that after all these long years of heart-hunger and loneliness I am to have a home of my own." And Margaret laid her head on her friend's breast with a little sob, and clung with her arms about her shoulders.

"Why, Margaret! whatever ails you? Of course you have a home. I've always told you so," declared Rebecca, with decision and surprise struggling in her voice.

"But, dear Rebecca, it isn't that," persisted Margaret earnestly, if not quite lucidly. "Lawyer

Harris of Richmond has been here, and I am to have a home of my own. Can you not believe it?"

But Rebecca Price was still silent, unresponsive through bewilderment.

"Sit down," said Margaret, who saw dimly through a mist of tears, "and I will tell you about it." And putting her hands on her friend's shoulders, she pushed her with gentle violence into a seat.

When Miss Price had heard all there was to tell, all that Margaret herself knew,—which was so little, yet so much,—her heart responded in instant sympathy with her friend's joy, and her congratulations were warmly spoken and heartfelt. Yet she could but wonder what manner of man this Lawyer Harris could be, and wished most sincerely that she might have been present at the interview between him and Margaret.

II.

THE JOURNEY TO THE OLD PLANTATION.

THE next day but one after the lawyer had called on Margaret was the time set for their visit to her new possessions. Lawyer Harris would come up from Richmond by the early train. She, with Miss Price, was to meet him at the railway junction; and together they would go on to the old plantation, where Margaret would be given legal possession of her estate.

To the dismay of both Margaret and Miss Price, the latter was very unexpectedly detained as a witness in court in an unimportant case to be tried that day. But Margaret knew that she could not disappoint the lawyer in a matter of this kind. She would go alone, she said; and for Margaret to resolve that it was right to do a thing was the earnest of its doing.

It was early when she came out of the door and down the steps; then she paused to look about her and up at the sky, exclaiming:

"'What's in the air? Some subtle spirit runs through all my veins;
Hope seems to ride this morning on the wind, and joy outshines the sun.'

"Was the poet inspired by just such a day as this when he wrote these lines, I wonder?" she murmured. For it was a glorious day that she was

to have for her journey. There had been a soft-falling rain in the night; with the sunrise had sprung up a sweet spring wind, and there was a scud of torn clouds across a brilliant blue sky; while in the valley the white mists, stretching ribbon-like down its length, rose transparent and wavering, till turned into a golden haze by the early sun.

Margaret walked in an ecstacy of delight, with every sense of her being alive and in sympathy with nature's heart-throbs. Why should she not be happy? she asked herself, drawing in full breaths of the invigorating air which sent the blood tingling to her finger-tips. It was a joy just to be alive such a morning as this.

The junction where the express and local accommodation exchanged passengers was a mile below the village. The walk gave her time to indulge in the intoxicating fancies thronging her brain. And she gave free rein to them, till she felt like running with the wind in its exhilarating chase across the flats.

She had time for this abandonment of spirit, this revelry with nature's forces, and time to get back to her conventional self, before she stood on the platform at the junction and greeted the lawyer as he stepped sedately from the car and spoke to her. He looked a little wonderingly at her animated face, full of a brightness she could not get out of it.

Margaret explained her coming alone in as few words as possible, with a little hot protest in her heart that she must speak of it at all.

"There is no reason why you should not come

alone," said the lawyer; "and it would have been not only a disappointment, but a serious inconvenience to us both had you not done so."

Margaret thanked him in her heart for the delicate way he met her explanation, but only said, "Is not this an unusually brilliant morning even for spring; have you observed it?"

"I had not observed anything," he replied, "beyond the fact that there is a high wind blowing."

"The air is full of voices; Nature is surely laughing to-day."

The lawyer looked at the young woman at his side as she said this, and raised his eyes to the sky, then swept them across the low, undulating hills to where they banked against the blue arch of sky, and down the valley to where the wind beat the mist before it till the warm sunshine kissed it up.

He was a quiet, plain-looking man, this Lawyer Harris, not tall, not above the medium height, but a pair of firmly-muscled shoulders gave him an appearance of great physical strength. This much Margaret had observed on first meeting him in Miss Price's small parlor. But now, as he stood quietly on the little railroad platform, with that admirable repose so marked in the strong, self-controlled man of the world, the impression was intensified and deepened.

The north express had gone out and the local was pulling in, when he turned with a new interest in his face.

"You are right, Miss Steyne; it is an unusual day. It is years since I saw just such a one."

After they entered the car, and Harris had found

a comfortable seat for Margaret and lowered the window, he reversed the seat in front of her and sat down. She felt instinctively that he was going to watch her, to think about and make a mental analysis of her, as it were ; in fact, to be politely impolite. Well, let him make the most of his opportunity—and his subject. She was not particularly disturbed by it, yet very naturally found herself speculating as to the result of his diagnosis. Would it be favorable or otherwise ?

She wondered if this man had been her cousin's friend, and wished she knew. Was it possible that he would dislike her because she was his heir, because she was coming into his home ? It seemed a foolish thought, but for a moment it gave her a feeling of disquiet, ti'l suddenly, by one of those cyclonic mental revolutions by which we sometimes project ourselves backward or beyond, her point of view changed. It was no longer, would he like her ? but should she like him ? she asked herself half curiously. This taciturn, positive lawyer was not magnetic ; his new-found client could not by any effort of the imagination think of herself as being drawn toward him.

She almost smiled, now, as she remembered his behavior on his first visit to her, which made her think of one sent on an unpleasant errand ; and Margaret felt sure the errand had been an unpleasant one to him, though why, she could not in the least imagine. But if she did not like Lawyer Harris, would she need to see much of him after the first details of the business had been arranged ?

This thought brought a ray of comfort with it.

"A bondage can be endured if there be hope of deliverance from it," she thought.

He had a rather good face, Margaret had to admit, as she furtively studied his features. The forehead was broad and massive above the heavy brows. A pair of clear, penetrating gray eyes looked from beneath. The thick, dark hair, closely trimmed, was not a little gray at the temples, although he could not be over forty-five, and might be several years younger; a heavy beard is always deceiving. He had at least not reached the garrulous age, she thought. He knew how to be silent.

Then of a sudden she began to speculate as to how that mind over there on the opposite seat was working, and almost smiled. Did he think that she was going to question him, that he should wrap himself in repelling silence as a defense against her? She rather enjoyed the state of affairs than otherwise, and would do nothing to dispel or break down this conversational quarantine; and so the journey that took a little less than two hours' time was accomplished in silence.

Walsingham, the station at which they left the train, was a short mile distant from Steyne House. Lawyer Harris had expressed his intention to procure a conveyance, if it could be done.

"If you wish it for yourself," said Margaret, "I shall not object, but I should like to walk, for the wind, though strong, is invigorating and will not tire me."

"I don't wish it," he protested, with a touch of savagery in his manner vastly amusing to his companion; but she demurely yielded to him the small

traveling-bag he cavalierly offered to carry for her, and buttoning her long gray wrap, announced herself ready to set out.

The village of Walsingham contained about four hundred inhabitants, counting white and black, and was well situated. It would have been a pretty place but for the down-at-the-heel look it still wore. On the west, where the hill began its ascent, a wide creek came flowing swiftly out of the north. The bed of the stream at this point was dotted with boulders large and small, irregular and moss-patched, as they lay half covered by the water. Among these small rocky islands the water fretted and eddied into white curls of spray as it shouldered against them. A narrow footpath made up of clay and gravel brought one to a crazy-looking foot-bridge, which boasted no suggestion of a hand-rail. But Margaret declined all assistance from Lawyer Harris, and followed alone, declaring that it would be rank affectation for a native Virginian to hesitate at crossing a foot-log.

Spanning the creek, lower down a hundred yards or so, was a new wooden bridge in a glory of red paint, by the side of which a clump of pussy willows stood guard. This bridge looked strangely out of keeping with the general state of forlornness everywhere visible. It was new and whole, being the only structure in the village that could be so described.

Walsingham had once been a fairly prosperous "town," as it was called in the days when the planters hauled their tobacco there, and agents from the large cities came to receive and store it. The old

tobacco warehouses, silent mocking monuments of that better time, stood empty now but for the contraband negroes, whole families of whom had found refuge there in lieu of better quarters.

When the war ended, and the smoke of battle cleared away from the valley, the people had carried the shot out of their houses, patched their walls, and waited ; but the old activity was gone, and nothing came to take its place. They seemed not to be able to take up their lives again. War with its resistless force had trampled out the ambitions and prostrated the energies of this never too energetic people.

The new bridge, with its strong timbers and fierce color, the first sign of a reviving interest in improvement, was the pride of every inhabitant of the village. It was as the boulevard to the metropolis, the favored promenade and trysting-place of all the village belles and beaus. Many a bright-eyed maiden met there the most important crisis in her life. There, above the running water, against the shadow of the swaying willows, lovers came to exchange low-spoken vows of constancy ; for when have lovers not believed that troth plighted over running water would prove sacred and enduring, that vows so made would not be lightly broken ?

III.

MARGARET ENTERS THE HOME OF HER ANCESTORS.

THE lawyer and Miss Steyne were winding slowly up the hill-path, when she turned to look about her.

"This must have been a beautiful country once," she remarked.

"Yes; it was a well-favored part of the old Virginia, and will be again, though it will be years before it is altogether restored," said the lawyer.

"In what direction are we going?" she questioned. "I have lost my bearings."

"We are going due south, and just around the hill there stands the old Steyne homestead. The plantation lies south and east of the house. It has not been cultivated for many years. Even before the war it lay idle, but it has had better care than the average plantation about here, and does not look so neglected," the lawyer said, in tones that sounded somewhat less depressing, though not quite encouraging.

"Is the house closed? Is there no one there to receive us?" Margaret asked at last, in despair of his volunteering any further information about her affairs.

"Certainly, there is some one to receive us. The two old colored people, Henry's servants, who have lived there for twenty-five years, have charge of the

house. Had I not told you so?" he asked, looking round at her as she walked by his side.

"I believe not," she said briefly. She had observed that in speaking of her cousin, he had called him Henry.

"Of course," resumed the lawyer, "the house is practically closed and made secure, everything being left to your decision. Your power is absolute."

They were ascending the hill by a footpath, which, though steeper, was a short cut, and led to the side of the house, whence, through a gate in the stone wall, it crossed the old-fashioned garden, to the door.

The wind was strong on the hill and came sweeping out of the south against them; but Margaret was a good walker and was not fatigued when a turn in the path brought them around the shoulder of the hill and in sight of Steyne House. She stopped at once and stood quietly looking at the old historic building which had been the home of her people for more than a century. Surprise held her silent, for the place showed none of the ravages of war such as she had seen everywhere. Instead, the fine old house lay quiet and imposing in the morning light. It was large and rambling, yet its easy style of architecture did not detract from its strength. It was a combination of old Colonial and Southern, having been built before the war of the Revolution: and later the wide, luxurious verandas, which are features of all Southern homes, had been added, giving to the whole an air of generous comfort. They were beautifully garlanded now, these wide, roomy verandas, with the hardy Virginia

creeper, which flourishes nowhere else so luxuriantly as on its native soil. The numerous windows with their small panes of glass gave to the unconventional old house a cheery, twinkling look, which inspired a feeling of good-fellowship. It had been painted many years previously a warm dark red, and time had mellowed the gray roof and tinted sides into a complete harmony with its surroundings, till there seemed a kinship running through all.

This picturesque old house stood out in full relief against a strip of wood, which was full this April morning of the wonder of growing, radiant in robe of delicate green, the green of tender leaf and bursting bud, which caught the full sunshine. The old orchard, where only a few gnarled, twisted trees kept watch like sentinels on a deserted plain; the paddock, the roomy, irregular garden, which encroached on the lawn with its clumps of odorous shrubs,—all were surrounded by low stone walls, gray and lichen-grown, broad and sturdy, with here and there a wild vine trailing along the top.

Small wicket gates, like openings in a wall of defense, led out of the yard into the orchard and the bit of pasture lying between the house and the green wood. It was because of these sturdy, picturesque fences, which could not be converted into heat and light, that the place had suffered so little from the small detachments of troops and scouting parties from both armies, which had occasionally crossed the old plantation in those days of forced marches and midnight rides.

The perspective of the soft-toned picture was a chain of mountains, which in all their strength and

grandeur of outline swung within a half league of the old house, then bent sharply away again in a long sweep of misty softness.

This was Margaret's home, with all the glamour of the new season enveloping it. She stood gazing upon it with eyes that were bright and warm, her soul filled with its restful beauty, her heart overflowing with gratitude to God, that the supreme wish of her heart had been granted her, and so generously, when she would have been happy with so little.

She gave no heed to her companion's presence. The silent, ungenial man no longer exerted a repressive power over her spirit. She forgot to think of him. She cared not that he narrowly watched her face, striving to read her inmost thoughts as they shaped themselves in her mind, to seize every emotion of her soul as it spoke from her eyes. Would the stern, silent, intense man accomplish the purpose he had in his heart? At last she turned and looked at him.

"I am sure I shall like it," she said heartily.

But her companion turned, and led the way to the wicket gate without speaking.

They passed through the narrow primitive gate and up the lilac-bordered path of the garden. An old black woman had appeared in the doorway, and seeing them, came on till she stood at the head of the walk, where courtseying and smiling she waited for them to come up; a typical old aunty of antebellum days, thrifty and tidy she looked in bright turban and stiffly starched apron of blue-and-white check, the hem of which touched the graveled walk with every genuflection.

"Good-morning, Hagar; I've brought you company to-day," said Lawyer Harris, speaking familiarly to the old servant.

"So ye has, Marse Ha'is, an' I's glad ter see ye, monst'us glad. I hope ye cum t' stay a right sma't spell. Hit's pow'ful lon'soum-lak up heah now."

The good-natured face was a heartening sight to the new mistress. The cordial welcome might all be meant for the lawyer, but she appropriated a share of it to herself, and felt the happier for it.

"Yes, 'tis powu'ful still up heah, and de days 'peah so long," the old woman rambled on as she preceded them around to the front door, which she threw wide for the unexpected guests; and with a swelling heart Margaret entered the home of her ancestors.

There had been an estrangement between her father and the father of Henry Steyne, and though the brothers both regretted and forgave it before the death of the elder, the delicate, sensitive sister-in-law never visited there; so that, until to-day, when she entered it as her own home, Margaret had never looked upon the old house.

"Will you sit here, Miss Steyne, till the library is opened and a fire laid?" said the lawyer; and leaving he followed to give Hagar instructions.

Margaret found a seat and looked about her. It was a hall that greeted you with largest welcome, and she was glad of it to-day—wide and generous, strong and symmetrical in effect, from the heavy oak beams of the ceiling to the wide, luxurious stairs, which seemed to glide rather than walk to the floor above. A tall eight-day clock, in a carved case of

the same wood, standing primly against the wall, ticked in a loud and friendly fashion that did her heart good ; for, if there was one thing that Margaret liked, it was a clock that ticked emphatically and tolled the hours loudly and clearly that all might hear ; and she smiled up at the friendly face now as it ceased the hour stroke. It was a cheerful-faced clock, such as were fashioned by the ancient craftsmen. A mimic sun radiant in gold peeped over the top of the dial, keeping an eye seemingly on the slender crescent moon below, which appeared to be ever slipping out of sight, yet did not. The whole hall had a sweet old-time look that breathed of other days.

The lawyer returned shortly, and stood gazing moodily through the open doorway. The green-girt hill undulating away in soft waves to the valley, was a pretty sight at any time. To-day the tender radiance of spring was upon it, and across its surface the sun chased the cloud-shadows in mad merriment. But its freshness and sweetness brought no light to the eye of the gloomy-browed man gazing out upon it.

It was not an easy face to read, but surely, Margaret thought, there was a hint of sadness about the firm mouth. Had he been fond of her cousin, the former master here ? She found herself returning to this point with annoying persistency, found herself groping after this keynote, which slipped away from her just as persistently, as she sought in the actions of the lawyer evidence to confirm or disprove the theories her fancy wove. "When I was a child I asked questions if I wanted to know anything ;

why not try it now?" she mused; and the thought itself was half a dare.

"Mr. Harris, did you know my cousin well? Were you his friend?" she asked in that straightforward manner peculiar to her, which always brought an answer to what she asked.

The lawyer, who had turned at the first sound of her voice, came and seated himself on the wide settle by her side.

"Was I Henry Steyne's friend, or simply his man of business, you wish to know? Well, I was both. We were friends before I studied law, and afterward, when I located in Richmond, I took charge of his entire business, at his urgent request, and the new relation did not affect our friendship. I have passed many pleasant hours with him here, and miss him more than I thought it possible to miss anyone. Henry Steyne was the best friend I ever had."

Lawyer Harris had never spoken more truthfully.

"Then I want to tell you," said Margaret, "that I am going to make this my home. I became an orphan at an early age. I have always been alone. I have had no people, and no home. When I came back to Virginia I went to Winston, and arranged to live with Miss Price, a friend of my mother's, with whom you found me. Now for the first time I have a home I can call my own. If you could but realize how much the thought of it is to me you would understand my gratitude to my poor cousin, who has given me such great happiness, the greatest that could come to me."

"I believe I do understand now," said the lawyer in his even tones, "and I hope you have made a wise

decision in making this your home. But come into the library ; you will chill if you remain here longer after walking ;" and going forward he held the door open for her to pass through.

Margaret knew that the lawyer had not sympathized with her enthusiasm ; she felt intuitively that her decision was not one that he approved. In the library she stood by the hearth, drawing her gloves off slowly. The lawyer had brought a chair forward for her. She did not sit, but looked at him calmly from where she stood.

"You said you hoped I had made a wise decision in the matter of coming to live here. Will you tell me why you said that, unless you meant to imply a doubt of it ?" she said.

For the first time he seemed to regard her words attentively, and it was with an air of apparent interest and candor that he replied.

"That was what I meant. I should not have advised you to try it, nor do I think your cousin expected that you would live here," he said guardedly.

"Will you tell me why you would have advised against it ?" she asked.

"I would advise against it, first, because of the isolation ; the loneliness would be unbearable. I could not be induced to try it."

"Is that the only reason ?"

"It is the only one that I would consider, but you will need to take into account other things. First, the risk a woman would run in living in such a remote, lonely place. Then the expense you must be at to put the place in good repair ; for, notwithstanding it was put in tolerably fair shape after the

war, when labor was cheap, it now needs considerable additional outlay. And the income from the investments would not meet the expense of maintaining it. But I will leave you, if you will permit, and order a cup of coffee," said the lawyer, withdrawing himself out of the way of further conversation on the subject, having said all he wished to say.

Margaret removed her hat, and drawing the chair farther away from the blaze, sat down to rest. The lawer's discouraging views of her home-making in no way affected her spirits. Not a ray of her sunshine was dimmed. To-day her world was beautiful, joyous; nothing, it seemed to her, could mar its brightness; and she looked about the old room with the interest of possession and expected association.

It was a large, square, low-ceiled, and companionable-looking room. The painted walls were dark with age, the windows high and the panes small, but there were plenty of them, and the sun sifted through them in uncertain golden fragments as the broken clouds sailed by. A row of shelves that filled the wide space at the right of the fireplace held a goodly collection of books, and some curious foreign-looking tabacco jars were pushed primly into the corner next the window, while on the top of the case rested a fine bust of Shakespeare. A wide wooden settle, the kind in use a century ago, lay along the wall underneath the south windows. A large square of wine-red carpeting on the floor supplied just the color needed to save the room from being monotone. Yet, without it, the room could not have been dull, for the generous old fireplace was a heartening picture

of itself. Immense brass andirons, high and massive, with lions' heads on top and lions' claws for feet, stood fiercely on guard beside the strong jambs ; while high above the broad tiled hearth, shoulder-high to a man, was a narrow mantel-shelf of wood a century old, which, with an air of feeling the dignity of its antiquity, held itself primly aloft like a decayed gentlewoman with her chin in the air. On either end of the mantel were tall brass candlesticks of artistic design. In the middle space stood a small box of dark polished wood, with a beautifully carved hasp and corner-pieces of brass ; and to add to its appearance of solidity and strength, it was heavily studded with brass nails with octagonal heads. In shape it was not unlike a lady's work-box, only that it seemed heavy for such purpose. But for years, almost a quarter of a century, there had been no lady at Steyne House. No woman's voice but that of a servant's had echoed through these rooms, and had the box been designed for that purpose, the owner must long since have found other use for it.

Margaret breathed a sigh of happiness. Ah ! how she would enjoy this quaint old house, with its storied rooms furnished much as they were furnished a century ago ! Keenly would she delight in making of it a woman's house once more. But no one of its historical landmarks should be obliterated ; none of its individuality destroyed. Quaint and old-fashioned it should remain as a tale of other days. She would in that indefinable way which only a woman understands bring it into harmony with her life and tastes.

IV.

HENRY STEYNE'S WILL.

In the old library by the fire, Margaret sat dreaming, and was fast slipping away from the present into an ideal existence, when she was suddenly awakened to the real, by the entrance of Hagar, with coffee and bread and butter, which she declared was "only a 'pology" for something to eat, until she should get dinner cooked.

"Ef I'd on'y a know'd ye wuz a-cummin', ye wouldn't a hed to wait," she added in genuine distress.

Miss Steyne sympathized with the old woman's feelings in the matter of a surprise, and was assuring her that it was of no consequence whatever, when Lawyer Harris entered the room.

Hagar had placed the coffee on a small table at Margaret's side, and had gone back to her kitchen. Harris did not sit, but drank his coffee standing, with his profile in relief against the light of the window, and Margaret was struck by the resolute cast of his features. She was beginning to think that she should dislike this silent, self-controlled man. "I hope we shall get on well together, if we are obliged to see much of each other," she mused; "but how tyrannical and altogether disagreeable he *could* be if he tried. What a bear to lead, if he did not want to be led!"

Her thoughts were interrupted by the bear in question, who shoved the tray away and seated himself at the other side of the table. Taking some papers from his pocket, he looked over them for a few moments in silence, and then said :

"I will now read your cousin's will if you are ready to listen to it."

Margaret assented by a bend of her head.

"It is not a will in a strictly legal sense, you will observe : it is more a statement. Henry Steyne died intestate, and you inherit by descent. This, then, is really no more than an expression of his wishes, and you are not obliged to observe them ; that is, legally, you understand."

Besides the plantation, which was clear of encumbrance, there were a few hundred dollars on deposit in a New York bank, some bank stock, and some railroad bonds on a Northern line, which had been purchased before the breaking out of the war. These, with the homestead and the furniture, constituted Margaret Steyne's inheritance. There were small money gifts to Gabriel and to Hagar. They had been faithful to the testator while he was master, and he hoped that they might remain on the old plantation, but he in no way made it obligatory on the new owner to retain them. So read the will of Henry Steyne.

"My cousin showed his kindness of heart by his thought for his old servants, and I shall not fail in carrying out his wishes ; he has been very considerate of what mine might be, and of my rights in the matter," said Margaret.

"To my mind your cousin's suggestion was

prompted by the belief that you would want some one to stay on in the house, unless you should desire to sell the plantation, which I believe he thought you would better do," said the lawyer.

"You understood, then, that he did not expect me to live here?"

"I certainly believe that he did not expect you would live here. He knew that it would be much too lonely, if not imprudent, for a young woman, with only two old colored servants for companions and protectors," declared the lawyer in his most suave but decided tones.

Margaret flushed a little but she said steadily:

"I am sorry he could not have known that I would not sell the old plantation, and that I should come here to live, and keep the old place in the family—for that is what I shall try to do—for many years yet."

"I see that your decision is not assailable for the present," said the lawyer, in a more acquiescent tone of voice. "Nothing but a trial of life on a lonely Virginia plantation will satisfy your ambitions. You are very brave now before you have made a beginning, but if you should in time change your mind and wish to alter your plans, I can perhaps find a purchaser for the place."

"You are very kind," replied Margaret, "but do not think me more brave than I am, nor more rash. I shall not try to live alone; I shall have some one to live with me."

The suspicions of Harris were instantly aflame. There was a flash of suppressed rage in his eyes, a moment of uncontrolled anger, which his companion

did not see, for she had taken up her cousin's will from the table to read over a portion of it.

Had she heard the curse in his throat, or guessed the sudden anger that burned in his heart, she would have been startled, but when she looked at the calm, inscrutable face, it told none of the heart's passions. Eye and voice had served a stern apprenticeship of many years to a curious and critical world; they would not fail him now, and betray what he willed they should not.

Margaret laid the paper down. "I talked with Miss Price about it, about coming here to live," she said, "and she will live with me. It will be just as it has been, and I could have no one who would fill the place so well. She is not young, and will not be lonely, though we be isolated and quiet."

"That will be an excellent plan," assented the lawyer readily; "couldn't be better, and I am glad that you have made such an arrangement. It is exceedingly fortunate that you can have her if you still persist in trying life here."

The lawyer's tone and his prodigality of words were unusual, and Margaret looked at him a little wonderingly. "I believe he thought I meant that I should marry," she told herself slowly, "and he is mightly pleased that it is not so;" and for a moment the dark lashes swept the white cheek, hiding the amusement which shone in the brown eyes despite her self-restraint

Had she ceased to be able to express herself lucidly? she wondered, or were people growing more stupidly dull? "Dull or not," she thought, "had I known what was in his mind he would not have

been so quickly undeceived, though I'm 'most sure after all that I am the stupid one. But why should he care about my marriage? What is it to him that he should approve or disapprove?" she asked herself the question thoughtfully.

She could no longer remain blind to the fact that Lawyer Harris was jealous of a new owner for the old place, of a new occupant in the home of Henry Steyne, and she was coming to fear that if the wishes of his dead friend and patron weighed so much with him he might feel it incumbent upon him as far as lay in his power to carry them out strictly. If it were so, she could not think less kindly of him for his loyalty to his friend's memory, but hoped that his feelings about it would not be made an excuse for the abridgment of her liberty, or interfere with her unfettered enjoyment of her new home. She knew now that no difference of opinion must be allowed to create a spirit of antagonism between the lawyer and herself, for on him she must for the present depend, willy nilly, for all the information and help she might need, as there was no one else to whom she could go, however much she might wish it. But her cousin had trusted him implicitly, it seemed, and why should not she trust him?

"I should like, Mr. Harris," she said, "to have you remain in the same business capacity to me that you held to my cousin, to counsel and advise me, until I shall have had time to look about me and to grow into an understanding of things naturally and easily, for they are new to me."

The lawyer, though secretly rejoiced, gave his

answer with his accustomed deliberation and studied indifference of manner.

"I see no reason," he said, "why I should not continue my care of your interests, since it is your wish that I should do so, and I have the business so well in hand. But we will postpone all further discussion of these matters till after dinner, as the bell is ringing;" and rising, he took up the papers, and with a business man's habitual caution, placed them in the old secretary and locked it, taking a bunch of keys from his pocket for the purpose.

Hagar, in best gown and turban, waited in state for them to be seated, satisfied that she had done all and more than could be expected of her in so short a time. Her face was one vast expanse of gratification and good-will, and she might well be proud of such a dinner, "jes' flung togedder," as she expressed it. Brown, crisp chicken and broiled ham, flanked by a dish of flakey potatoes, hot, light biscuit, amber coffee, with peach preserves and cake.

Margaret considerately complimented the old colored woman on her cookery and thanked her for the trouble she had taken for their comfort. When they were about ready to leave the table the lawyer spoke.

"Hagar, I wish to formally introduce you to Miss Steyne, a cousin of your late master, the future mistress of Steyne plantation. She expects, I believe, to come here soon to live."

Old Hagar's eyes widened with the most intense astonishment. The communication was evidently unlooked-for, the situation unexpected, for she was

startled out of her usual calm; and forgetting training and courtesy in the surprise of the moment, her hands went up on a level with her face as she exclaimed,

"Fo' de Lawd! Massa Ha'is, hit ain't true; ye don' mean it, now do ye? Dis young ting our missus, I done tot——"

"Yes, I mean it, Hagar; it is all true, and you will tell Gabe that I wish to see him; you may both come to the library in half an hour from now."

"'Deed, I'll tell him dis berry minnit; I'se mighty fergitful;" and old Hagar hastened away with what was for her unusual speed.

The man and the woman at the table smiled as the portly figure vanished down the hall in search of Gabriel, her very headdress in a quiver of excitement.

"Not all the king's horses nor all the king's men could hold her," laughed the lawyer. "When Gabe has been duly enlightened she will regain her normal condition. I have heard Henry say that she lived 'to tell Gabe,' and she does not often have so startling a piece of news to communicate, I'm sure,"

"What a depository of odds and ends and curious bits Gabe's mind must be by this time," said Margaret; "a sort of family scrap-bag."

Old Hagar hastened back to the dining-room bemoaning audibly her lack of manners in having left the room without being dismissed.

The next half hour was one of suspense to old Gabriel and his wife in the kitchen. They felt the

very foundations shaking under their feet. They might have to leave the old place, and that would be the greatest calamity that could befall them. The possibility of such a thing had never entered into their calculations. They had not planned about their future, because a change of any kind had always appeared so remote that it had not been considered or discussed by them ; and besides, it was not their way. But now, with the coming of a new mistress who was young,—which they had not expected,—much too young, they reasoned, to be content to live up here, they realized the danger of a change, and it would be like going out of the world to these two old people were they compelled to leave the plantation.

Hagar had lived there continuously for twenty-five years, and Gabriel for the same length of time, except for the short period that he had voluntarily absented himself looking for the luxuries of freedom in the wake of the Northern army, which Hagar declared " He neber would 'a' done, on'y he was bawn in Ma'ch 'n had a flyin' min' ; " but somehow the prospect, alluring when distant, had not proved sufficiently satisfying to induce him to prolong his wanderings, and he came back, as he said, " jis' 'cos he couldn't fergit how lon'sum an' unpertected Massa an' Hagar wur ; " and with the crown of his hat in his hands he shifted uneasily from one foot to the other, unable to lift his eyes from the floor, as he stood before his master and his wife a self-proclaimed monument of unselfishness and devotion.

All such sentiment, however, Hagar, with a sniff of derision, disposed of in two words.

"Gabe's hongry," she exclaimed, eying him with what contempt her placid nature was capable of.

The master laughed, while Hagar took the runaway out to the kitchen, fed and cried over him and scolded him by turns, until he was reduced to a proper degree of humility and submissiveness and given absolution. Since that time Gabe had seemed to entertain a lively horror of any further pilgrimages after strange gods. No more straying away from the old home for him. All they both asked was to be allowed to remain where they were the remainder of their days.

The fateful interview with the lawyer and the new mistress in the library after dinner, resulted to the satisfaction of the two old colored people. With some slight change from the former arrangement, they were to remain. Margaret Steyne evidenced to the lawyer that she had a mind and opinions of her own, and knew how to maintain them with mild firmness. The control of her servants must be in her own hands, and they were given to understand that they were to remain only so long as they were faithful and obedient, which you may be sure they promised with much sincerity to be.

The day was waning, and Margaret, having had time for only a hurried look through the main part of the house, under Hagar's guidance, stood waiting for the lawyer, who, with Gabriel at his heels, was coming down the path from the barn, having been on a tour of inspection of outside matters generally. But the last orders had been given, and old Hagar was saying :

"Ye'll not disapp'int us 'bout comin', missus?"

"No," Margaret replied, "I will not fail. You may expect me one week from to-day, and Gabriel will be sure to meet us at the train."

"No feah ob dat, missus, no feah ob dat 'tall; de ole man 'ud set up de night befo' to 'member it," assured Hagar.

To the two old colored people left on the hill the change about to take place furnished matter for much speculation and earnest discussion, and old Gabriel, as he milked the amiable black-spotted cow that evening, and fed the little white bossie, talked to them, as was his habit, of what was on his mind.

"I's glad ye 's so white an' purty," he was saying to the calf. "She'll lak to see ye, an' put her li'l han's on ye, fer yer truly am de wises' li'l calf I eber did see."

And the wisest little calf proceeded to attest its approval by bunting its fat pink nose in the old darky's stomach with no mild enthusiasm.

"Hi dar! ye li'l misch'f, doan ye be so fren'ly," he remonstrated; and though the old man's chores were all done he pottered serenely about the barn, his sable figure showing in vivid silhouette against the red clouds banked along the western horizon.

But Aunt Hagar's voice calling to him from the back doorstep brought him to a realizing sense of his unnecessary delay.

"Gabr'l! a'nt ye putty nigh reddy to cum down? 'Pears lak ye's goin' ter stay up dar all eb'nen."

There was an abused sound in the voice, which Gabe well understood.

"Now jes' heah de ole 'ooman!" and Gabriel laughed softly to himself. "She can't no ways stan'

it, she mus' hab sumbudy to talk to. Well, I dosn't wonner. Dar's de cat now, but she doan tak ter critters, pears lak ;" and Gabriel gathered up his pails and took his way soberly down the path.

"I's glad dat de new missus is comin', deed I is. Hagah's pow'ful lon'sum now dat de ole Massa's gone, an' she mus hab some'un to talk to. A 'ooman feels bettah when she talks a heap ; hits good fer em, it seems," communed Gabe aloud, with many a shake and nod of the gray head.

He found the wife of his bosom sorely distressed in mind. She had been unduly excited by the events of the day, and now in the reaction was under a desperate depression of spirits, and such an avalanche of woeful predictions and complaints met him at the door as would have driven one not used to them wild, but Gabe no longer lost his bearings in a slight squall.

"Now, Hagah," he began remonstratingly, "whaffor yo actin' dis way ? Ef 'twazzent de wrong time in the moon I'd tink yo dun gone crazy ; I suttenly would."

But there was a tone of sympathy in the old man's voice which encouraged his wife to an outpour of her lamentations rather than an abridgment.

"I's habin' a mighty soah hea't, Gabe," she moaned. "I knows de new missus is a lady, an' she look good an' kin', but she am young and hansum an' mos' shuah ter marry ; den she might get ti'ed of we'uns an' sen' us away, an' we'll meet a sorrer. I mos' knows it, fer dar's a misery in my head, an' col' wattah a-triklin' up an' down my backbone."

"My, oh my !" muttered Gabe under his breath,

"she's in fer a out 'n' outer dis night, de ole 'ooman is. Ef I doan git her to bed sh'l be a blubberin' shuah befo' I knows it;" and the old fellow spoke as soothingly to his troubled partner as one would to a grieving child.

"Neber ye min,' Hagah, hit's all right now. Ye kno' dat eberyting allus do's cum right, an' 'taint good fer ye to fret no way. Ye allus feels poo'ly in de ebenin', pears lak. A good night's res'l sot ye up strong. Ye's ti'ed, dat's all; jes' go to bed, an' trus' in de Lawd. I'll bank de fiah, an' tek care ob de temporal tings."

V.

THE LIGHT IN THE WINDOW.

MARGARET STEYNE was preparing to leave the train at the junction. Lawyer Harris, who on the return trip had thawed out somewhat and become a degree more sociable, was saying :

"If there is anything I can do for you, let me know, and I will come up and see that you are comfortably settled."

"You are very kind, and I shall remember your offer, for lions may come out to meet me by the way where I had not looked for them," said Miss Steyne cordially ; and bidding him good-bye, she turned to find Miss Price waiting for her.

Lawyer Harris had but a glimpse of the strong, resolute face of the middle-aged woman who had come to meet Margaret, but that brief sight mystified him. "That is no Southern woman," he muttered, looking after the retreating forms of the two women. "But what does it matter, since Henry Steyne did not do what he might have done?" And the lawyer resumed his seat and fell into a train of thought that was not all pleasant. How Henry Steyne had learned that he had a cousin living had been to the lawyer a mystery, but not for long. Old Squire Cranston had known of it, and the lawyer's suspicions that the Squire had been the means of establishing her identity to her cousin and her claims upon

him as his heir, were confirmed on the day of the funeral, when the Squire, with all his old-time courtliness of manner, approached him and said :

" You have, I suppose, Mr. Harris, found among the effects of our late friend and neighbor one paper containing his last instructions, and making known his wishes ? "

The lawyer bowed in assent.

" I am glad that you have, sir ; glad that you have ; for he seemed to fear that through having no one but servants in his house, the papers might be lost or in some way misplaced, and to prevent any such accident having serious results he prepared two papers and deposited one in my keeping."

" Yes, I was aware that you had a copy in your possession," he returned. " He wrote me to that effect ; " and the lips did not falter as they fashioned the falsehood. " And," he continued blandly, " if you have the paper with you, Squire, and will return with me to the house, we will compare their contents."

And this girl who had just left him was Henry Steyne's heir, the mistress of the fine old plantation. " She is different," he was thinking, " from what I had expected ; many years younger than I supposed possible.

" She is pretty as a picture too, and a lady by all odds. Strange, though, she hasn't married ; lover killed in the war most likely. Anyway she is a well dowered young woman for these days in Virginia, and her land will grow more valuable if it is only well managed. But what the devil does a woman know about managing land, a Southern

woman at that? She will be sick of the job in a year's time; I give her that long. Then—well, I shall get my way. There is more than one road to a place, and more than one way of getting a thing when you want it bad, and Henry Steyne would have done well to remember that."

Miss Price had piled the wood high in the wide fireplace before she left home, and through the many-paned windows of the small cottage were bursting squares of rich Rembrandt light which seemed to lie upon the misty darkness rather than pierce it. In the goodness of her heart she had thought that Margaret's new home might not prove all that she had hoped. It might not be habitable even, for it must have been near the track of the armies where bitter desolation reigned, and she might be sadly disappointed. "I will make the house look as bright and pleasant as possible for her home-coming and if she is downhearted it will look cheerful and comfort her some," she reasoned; and the tea table stood invitingly spread in the firelight. It was a warm heart that beat in the bosom of the undemonstrative old maid.

But Margaret was not disappointed; she came back with such glowing accounts of her possessions, their new home on the hill, that Miss Price caught the infection of her spirits to a degree that unsettled somewhat her staid, unimaginative nature. To what extent her bewilderment of mind led her she discovered only after essaying to pour tea from an empty teapot. Then she laughed, and came down to a sense of her giddiness, as she called it. She

could be ready to leave Winston in a week's time if that was what was expected of her, she declared.

"We should not miss a day of this lovely spring weather," Margaret urged. "The lilacs are in bloom; they were my cousin's favorites, Hagar tells me, and he had a hedge of them planted on each side of the garden walk, tending and training the bushes himself till they meet overhead in a veritable bower of fragrance and beauty. I want to return to it before the fragrance has passed, and I want you to see our home just as soon as you can. I shall not be happy till you do."

During the afternoon of the next day Miss Price came in somewhat flushed and sat down in her low chair, fanning herself with her calash as she rocked to and fro.

"I have made arrangements for the house."

"How did you manage it so quickly?" asked Margaret, who, though accustomed to her friend's ability to manage, was surprised at the speedy results in this instance.

"It doesn't take long to do a thing after you once know what you want to do," asserted Miss Price. "Sam Byers, who used to clerk for my brother when he was a freckled-faced youngster and wore jackets, which he ought to be doing still, is married and going to carry on a store here. He wants a house to live in. His wife is somewhat slack-twisted, I know, but Sam is honest and will do what is right. He cannot pay a high rent, but enough to pay the taxes, and he will keep up repairs, and that is all I want. I feel sure that my brother would have helped him had he lived, and I shall

leave the furniture for them, as you say there is plenty up there."

Margaret had said that the house stood on a hill, and since then Miss Price had spoken of the place as "up there," and of "going up," till, as Margaret laughingly said, one might think they had immediate prospects of being transported from their earthly habitation to a higher celestial sphere. And as she laid her head on her pillow that night there was running through her mind like a rope through a slip-knot some lines she had learned in childhood from a school primer, and she found herself drowsily repeating, "Do we go?" "Do we go up?" "We do go up."

CHAPTER VI.

THE HOME-COMING.

Two ladies who had left the train at the station were walking slowly back and forth the short length of the platform. The younger of the two was Miss Steyne ; the other, her friend Rebecca Price. Margaret was going to take possession of her new home on the hill. Steyne House, so long silent, would once again echo to the sweet voice of a young and lovely mistress.

It was the day appointed for their coming. Gabriel, the old black servant, had not forgotten, and his good-natured wrinkled face was the first object the eyes of his mistress rested on as she stepped from the train. He was driving up to the platform in a light lumber wagon, drawn by a forlorn-looking team of mules—a large bony brown mule, and a small bony white mule. The large brown fellow was stepping forward with long swinging steps, as though to attest his appreciation of his stilt-like legs ; while his little mate, multiplying her short steps with the earnest and laudable intention of keeping up with her mate, looked like nothing else so much as a dingey towed by a brig in a choppy sea. It was a comical-looking team, alike in nothing save bones and poverty of flesh.

"Is that the family equipage, Margaret?" Miss Price asked, with the ghost of a smile lurking grimly about the corners of her mouth,

"I think not," said Margaret, laughing back brightly. "Though I scarce know what my possessions are, I hardly think that span belongs to me."

But Gabriel had anchored alongside the platform, with profuse apologies for the rude conveyance he was obliged to bring for his mistress.

"I didn't want ter brung dis heah sort ob t'ing," he declared, eying the outfit with high disfavor. "I didn't want ter 't all, but 't was jes' an impossity ter get any odder, jes' an impossity. Hagah sez, sez she, 'Take de ca'yall.' 'But,' sez I, 'I dassn't; hit's so ole it done brek down, shuah; hit ain't been out'en de kerridge house sins long befo' de wah.'"

"You did quite right, Gabriel," said his mistress, breaking in upon his lamentations. "This wagon is just what we want for our baggage and boxes. We want nothing else, as we are going to walk. Miss Price will show you our things."

The two ladies took the narrow path that led to the foot-log, the same path down which Margaret had followed Lawyer Harris a week before. In the past few days there had been heavy rains in the valley, and the water, which had then run shallow, now brawled loudly along the wide, stony bed, and crossing the narrow log was a little trying to a timid person.

Margaret, who was in the lead, paused. "Here is one of our lions, Rebecca; shall we turn back?" she called over her shoulder.

"No," answered Miss Price, stoutly; "might bring us bad luck. I can walk that foot-log if you can."

"Then come on, but one at a time," said Mar-

garet, making a pretty picture as with her skirts gathered daintily about her that they might not impede her progress, she stepped quickly across, while Miss Price followed more slowly but just as surely.

Gabe, happening to look up, stopped short in his work of "loading up."

"Now, jes' look at dem gals," he exclaimed, in tones of querulous solicitude. "Why doan' dey go roun' by de bridge, sensible-lak? Well, now, dey's ober that," he exclaimed in relieved accents, as they landed safely on the other side, "An' dar haint enny moah debilment dey c'n git into de res' of de way home;" and from that moment honest old Gabe was convinced that these two additional members of his household were to be watched over and taken care of; just so much more added to his responsibilities.

"Hi, Moses!" he ejaculated, as going slowly up the hill he seemed for the first time to realize the overwhelming duties of his position. "Tree wimmen to tek care ob; hit's no time to fink o' dyin'. Gee up dar! Get dem bones a-moobin'," he admonished his slow-going team. "Dis worl' doan stan' still."

The days passed on golden wings at Steyne House, while the new mistress wrought many changes in her home. Gabriel had done his best, surpassing Miss Price's wildest hopes in the precision and neatness of his garden and door-yard work, but Gabe, Miss Price was to learn, was totally unlike the mass of his race, for whose shiftless ways he had the liveliest disapproval.

Margaret, with Rebecca's help, fell easily and

naturally into the duties of her new position, and the management of her affairs soon came to be no burden. The settling of the house filled the hours with a pleasant excitement, and she was happier than she had ever been in her life. Going into that old house was like going into a new world filled with rare and odd things. Every day something of interest was discovered, some odd piece of furniture brought to light, some rare old china unearthed where it had been hidden away for safety ; and there were yet trunks and boxes under the eaves in the attic which Margaret was going to have brought to light some time ; but she should not hurry the examination, for, as she said to Miss Price, "the anticipation might prove the best of it after all."

The mysterious-looking brass-bound box stood before her on the high mantelshelf in the library, just where it had stood for years perhaps. She called it the sphinx. It would not speak, and it stood there impenetrable. No key could be found to unlock its fastness, no way discovered to break its tantalizing silence, till to Margaret it had come to seem almost endowed with a sense of human knowledge and feeling. She could easily have fancied each knobby brass nail a living, piercing eye, imbued with a subtle mysticism, as it sat stonily looking down at her, day after day.

"I don't believe I will ever touch the thing again," she exclaimed impatiently one day, after a careful but disappointing search for a hidden spring—"at least, not until I am sure I can open it."

"There !" she exclaimed, giving it an impetuous shove back against the wall ; "keep your secret

while you can, for be it evil or be it good I will wrest it from you some day."

Was it a trick of the wind, or did a mocking voice echo down the wide chimney, "some day"?

"Am I growing fanciful?" she asked, giving herself a little shake. "I need a modicum of Rebecca's common sense and some sunshine;" and taking down her broad hat from the deer-horns in the hall, she went out through the pasture, where the sun shone hot, and into the depths of the wood, where the soft star-eyed wild flowers looked shyly up at her from their setting of green leaves.

The fragrant herbs from which her feet pressed out the odorous breath as she walked would grow more fragrant as they browned and ripened in the summer sun. She scented with delight their pungent odor on the warm, languorous air that met her from the unsheltered pasture as she left the wood and came out to the line where the pasture and woodland met.

Here stood a spreading beech tree whose branches, full-leafed and drooping, had reared a glorious natural bower. This was Margaret's favorite resting-place. A comfortable seat had been placed there for her convenience. Nature, too, in her beneficence and for her especial pleasure, it seemed to Margaret, had contrived a most cunning cabinet. About shoulder high from the ground there was a small irregular opening in the trunk of the tree, where the odorous brown bark lay soft and dry. From out this recess Margaret fished a favorite book, and was soon lost to all idle speculation.

VII.

DESTINY.

"After the May time and after the June time,
Rare with blossoms and perfume sweet,
Cometh the round world's royal noontime,
The old midsummer of blazing heat."

THE heat of a July day, with a tinge of gray haze in the atmosphere, lay warm and slumbrous over Steyne House, when at midday a horseman came riding leisurely up the footpath or short cut, the steep declivities of which the blooded horse in his supple young strength seemed to disdain. He came on at a long swinging walk, his satin coat glistening in the sun with every straining of the flexible muscles, with every lifting of the dainty feet.

The rider dismounted at the gate, and, passing his hand over the head of his horse with a light caressing movement, dropped the rein over the post and came up the wide path. In age he might have been anywhere near thirty-five. The slight, well-built figure was above the medium height, the head was set well back on a pair of firm, square shoulders, and there was a certain proud carriage of the head when he walked, a slight lifting of the chin, which gave him the air of one born to command. The features were clear-cut and strong, if not regular, and the black hair and eyes went well with the sun-browned skin. A suit of gray tweed, with a wide-brimmed soft hat of the same color, and a pair of natty riding-boots

which covered his symmetrical feet, constituted his easy yet becoming costume.

His glance wandered over the old house, for with its warm, vagrant tones, its odd-shaped dormer windows, its brown roof dented with high-pointed gables, and flecked over with patches of gray-green moss, it made a lovely picture of quiet restfulness in the sunlight, for there was nothing to break the drowsy, droning stillness of noonday but the low murmurings of some snow-white pigeons on the eaves, where they cooed and plumed their feathers with deft pluckings of their pink bills.

The man's dark eyes lighted in poetic sympathy with the quiet scene, and he lingered in his walk to look at it; then he sighed, and with that sigh some of the brightness went out of the spirited face, and quickening his pace he mounted the steps, crossed the wide veranda, and used the heavy brass knocker.

The mistress was at home, and he was shown into the library, where Margaret sat writing. She rose from the secretary as he crossed the threshold, and came forward to meet him.

"I am Miss Steyne," she said simply.

A faint trace of surprise crossed the face of the man as his eyes rested on this young and lovely woman. Why he had expected to meet in the mistress of Steyne House an elderly person he did not know, but he knew now that all unconsciously he had.

"My name is Thorne," he said courteously. "I am interested in a company formed by Northern capitalists who are buying extensive coal-fields beyond

this, which we wish to open up as soon as we can secure railroad facilities. We are at the present locating a branch to connect with the main line at Walsingham below here. We have made the survey, and the line, I am told, runs through your land. I have called about the right of way."

He had accepted the seat offered him, with the easy courtesy of one accustomed to the drawing-room.

"Is it not quite a new enterprise?" Margaret inquired. "I had not heard it spoken of."

"Yes, we are just making a beginning, though we have had the matter under consideration for some time."

"I am truly glad," said Margaret, "that the mineral resources of the state are being discovered and developed. It will give her people employment. All her former industries having been prostrated if not destroyed, her people have been left sadly helpless and hopeless."

"Yes, that is true; and the mining of coal would furnish employment for large numbers of men who must otherwise remain idle for aught I can see."

"Can you explain to me on what part of my land the survey is located?" Margaret asked; and she listened while he told her.

"And now do you think you understand just where it is?" he asked.

"I am afraid I do not; I might be less obtuse," she said with a faint smile," if I had ever seen that part of my property. I have been here but a short time."

"If that is the case, you would better see

the land before deciding," said Mr Thorne; "and if you will set a time, I will go with you and point out the exact route we wish to take. I am staying at Walsingham for the present."

Miss Price entered the room, and Margaret introduced Mr. Thorne to her and explained the matter. They decided to look at the line of survey that evening, after the heat had abated somewhat.

Mr. Thorne rose; he looked tall in his riding boots.

"If you will name an hour convenient to you I will call for you at that time," he said bowing slightly to both ladies. There was a certain forceful grace in his movements, however trivial they might be.

They would go after six o'clock; it would be cool by then, Margaret said; and promising to return at that hour he said, "Good-bye."

"No," Margaret said, and smilingly shook her head in answer to old Hagar, who had appeared in the doorway, her face a silent but eloquent interrogation point.

"No company to dinner to-day, Hagar."

Hagar looked the disappointment she felt. She differed from most servants in that she liked to have company come to the house, that she might serve them at table. It was doubtless because of the isolated life her master had led that the mild excitement of a strange face at the table came to be so eagerly desired and watched for.

In the past, Hagar and Gabriel had found their excitement, as did most of the colored people of that region, in the protracted religious revivals held

semi-yearly, to which the slaves of that section all looked forward with high anticipations of enjoyment if not benefit. But the war had come, sweeping away long-established customs, and uprooting the social life of the country as completely as it had done the political and financial. The "big revivals" were no more, and nothing had come to their place. It could never again be as it had once been.

The old slaves who for many years had met and led the worship at those meetings, fraternizing with each other in joy and in sorrow, were scattered far and wide, many of them huddled together in hovels and sheds in the back alleys of the great Northern cities, suffering from cold and hunger, with difficulty securing food and warmth enough to sustain life. Many of them did not have sufficient, and the mortality among the freed people in Washington alone, in the first few months that followed emancipation, was as startling as it was pathetic. They lacked not excitement. There is a monotony that is exciting, the monotony of wanting to eat regularly ; and the excitement is in the fear of not obtaining food.

Truly the blessings of freedom came with slow, halting footsteps to many of those helpless, suffering ones, who in the excitement and stress of the times wandered away from their old homes and friends, in ignorance that in the great world their utter poverty and helplessness would be against them. Many of them looked back to their old plantation life, with its settled hours of labor and its freedom from care and responsibility, with longing and homesickness that were pitiful. Not

a few found their way back to where their homes had once been, and if these had been destroyed and could no longer afford them shelter, they squatted down as near thereto as they could. When Gabriel had exploited freedom and returned from his wanderings, he said:

"Yes, we's free, Hagah; and hit's nice to be free. Ye can go jis whar ye wants ter. But," he added impressively, "ye wants ter stay right heah, right whar ye is. De free niggah up Norf done got ter shif fer hissef, jes' lak white folks; now min' dat!"

And these two old people had accepted the new order of things as something not affecting their everyday lives, and remained quietly content with the isolated existence so desired by their master, making the most of the small diversions which came in their way; and now this active, broader life which had come to them with the advent of a new mistress, filled the measure of their content. After more than twenty-five years, Hagar had again the companionship of her own sex.

"But I do 'clar, Gabe," she was heard to say to her partner in a burst of confidence, "I do 'clar I done fergit how queer women folks is."

"Gre't Moses! I neber don' fergit it," declared old Gabe, chuckling almost to strangulation in his enjoyment of Hagar's honest confession and his own cleverness of retort.

VIII.

THE WALK TO THE BLUFFS.

THE sun was throwing long slant shadows, when the figure of Mr. Thorne swung into sight on the hill-path. Margaret and Miss Price, with Gabriel at their backs, went down the lilac-bordered walk, and met him at the gate where he had dismounted and stood waiting for them.

They went round the outside of the stone wall, and crossed the strip of yellow dusty road on to the wide stretch of soft green grass which, Gabe said, "wuz t' be a medder, ef he could on'y keep dem peste'n geese off'n it."

A venerable gray goose, with her long neck threateningly outstretched towards the advancing party, was keeping valiant guard over her flock of downy goslings, and the sight stirred Gabe's antagonism.

"Yes, dar ye be, 'n dar ye'l stay tel jedgment day, I 'spect," he muttered, with a withering look at the belligerent trespasser.

"I believe Gabe makes a point of being vexed when he sees a goose," said Margaret, "and I am sure would exterminate them all, but that they are the one delight of Hagar's heart."

"They seem indigenous to the soil of Virginia," said Thorne; "I see numerous flocks in my rides, and I like to see them; they bring to mind some

pleasant experiences in my early life. When I was a boy there was a flock of them on our lake, and much of my skill in managing a boat was acquired in trying to dash surprisedly into that flock of geese. How they splashed and dived, and what a noise they made! But I could never run them down; they always managed to outgeneral me. And they seemed to enjoy the sport of it as much as I."

"An old goose is a valiant antagonist in almost any kind of a battle," said Miss Price.

"There's a man in our survey gang who would endorse your sentiments most heartily," said Thorne; "he is afraid of them."

"Afraid of them!" exclaimed Margaret wonderingly.

"Yes, he is one of the chain-men whose duty among other things is to set the pegs. He is a German Jew, a small, quick-moving man, extremely nervous and impulsive. A few days ago, as they were working near a farmyard, an old goose with her young family strolled up to inspect their movements. The German was setting a stake and did not see her until she had walked up and given him a vicious bite on the leg. He sprang into the air with a yell that was startling, and quick as a flash he threw the peg he held in his hand at the goose, but missed his aim, and hit a young one which fell limply to the ground. Then he was sorry, and he exclaimed penitently, "Oh, you foolish goose! see vat you tun; I kilt your poy fer dat."

"Well, that's just like a goose, and just like a Dutchman," said Miss Price sententiously.

The lower end of the plantation was nearly a mile from the house. The long sweep of ground, sloping smoothly down, ended in a line of sudden dips and bluffs, extending almost the entire length of the plantation. Beyond this lay a narrow worm-like valley, and it was in this valley and close to the line of bluffs that the survey had been made. The boundary of Miss Steyne's land, as pointed out by old Gabriel, extended about two hundred yards beyond the bluff, and included the whole of the narrow valley. This portion, cut off from the main body by the railroad, would be so much waste land to her, and Mr. Thorne offered compensation according to the damage sustained.

"We must go up the valley," he explained; "should we move the line over to the other side, it would still be on your land; while it would be in a little better shape for you, the roadbed would be more expensive to the company. They will accept my valuation, and I have offered you what I should consider a just compensation were I the owner of the land. I will draw our contract with provisions protecting you in every way possible."

"I believe you will," said Margaret, with a straightforward look from the soft dark eyes into the eyes of the man before her.

There was a sigh on the man's lips, and in his heart a strange hesitancy to speak again; but conquering the feeling, he thanked her for her kind judgment, wondering how a man could be anything but straight with those eyes looking into his.

They returned along the foot of the bluffs by a narrow path, whether worn by human or animal

feet was hard to tell. It was deliciously cool down there, while on the upland the sun still shone with slanting yet penetrating rays, to avoid which they skirted the range, instead of returning as they had come.

Gabriel had seen "sumpin' black" on the side of a bluff, and had gone ahead to examine. The soft shale had been hollowed out three or four feet in width and five or six in height. A fire had been built in this excavation, which accounted for the blackness, and evidences were not wanting to show that cooking had been done there by someone, and recently at that. Chicken feathers scattered about and dead embers tell a straight tale to a darkey. Old Gabe, elevating his nose, sniffed the air significantly.

"See heah," he exclaimed to Miss Price, who had come up with him. "See heah!" waving his arms above the chicken feathers strewn thickly over the ground. "See dis heah; and see dat hole dar in de bluff. Dat war made to kin'le a fiah in. Some dem no 'count niggahs down dar;" and he jerked his thumb excitedly over his shoulder in the direction of the station. "Dey's bin heah; yes, dey's bin robbin' hones' folks' hen-kops, and cum heah to cook de pullets whar n' body kin see 'em. If I don' cotch 'em on dis lan' wunst, dar wont be a smatter'n ob dem lef," he declared stoutly. And the mild, easy-tempered old man waxed so indignant over the supposed trespass, that for a time he really believed that he would do as he said, and in imagination saw hosts of black woolly heads fleeing wildly from the fury of his wrath.

"Spare your denunciations, old fellow," said Mr. Thorne; "you are putting the blame on the wrong shoulders. It was my men who did it. Their tents were pitched just around the bluff there for a short time, and the wind being shifty, the cook scooped out that hole to make a fire in. I did not forbid it, because I did not think he was doing any harm,—and the chickens were paid for."

"Well now! Is dat so?" muttered old Gabe with a crestfallen air, while he meekly pulled his foretop in token of respect.

"But, Massa Thorne, hit looks like a shuah niggah trick, and I knows a niggah pu'ty well," he persisted.

"I rather think you do," said Mr. Thorne laughing. "Here is a dollar for you. Hunt up some chickens and have a bake on your own account. You would like it, wouldn't you?"

"'Deed I would, sah," said Gabe so promptly and earnestly as to cause a general laugh, while he poked about the hole in the bank with renewed interest. Over the roof of the cave or excavation was a thin layer of rock, which the heat had caused to split off from the body. This the old darky took hold of, and it pulled down easily.

"Why, dis am mos' lik a boa'd, so smoove an' light; I's gwine to tek it home to Hagah fer a kibber on a milk-crock."

"What kind of stone is that? Let me see it," said Miss Price, adjusting her glasses.

Taking it in her hands she examined it closely, presently calling to Margaret and Mr. Thorne, who were a little way ahead, to come back and look at it. "For," she said, "it looks like a slate they used

in Massachusetts for building purposes when I lived there. I don't know that it is, but it looks like it. It is certainly slate, but whether of any account I do not know."

They looked at the piece she held in her hand, at the piece from which it had split off, and at the ledges surrounding it.

"There is plenty of it, at least, for it crops out along the bluff above and below," said Thorne. "I had not handled it before, supposing it to be the usual brittle shale we are crossing often. We can tell little about it now by this piece, for it has been heated so thoroughly it may be quite different from what it was in its original state. Yet I should like to know ; it may be of value to you some time with a railroad so near ; but we will see."

As they turned to leave the low land, the last rays of the setting sun crested with a golden crown the tops of the tall oaks and beeches, while up their rugged trunks the soft gray shadows stole, and nestled down in the deep furrows of the bark. The sun had slipped out of sight in a sea of red, the red had grown paler, then faded to palest pink, till at last there was not even the afterglow. A thin slip of white moon hung by its tip above the rim of mountain when Mr. Thorne said good-bye at the gate, mounted his horse, and took the longer road toward Walsingham.

He was fond of the summer twilight and would lengthen rather than shorten his ride. He held the rein slack on the neck of his young horse, which, thoroughly trained to his master's moods, went slowly and daintily down the hill. But as the twilight

thickened the horse began to look about him, turning his head from side to side and rattling the bit uneasily, till the restlessness of the sensitive, nervous body communicated itself to his rider. Then Thorne drew up the rein.

"What is it, King? What's wrong with you, my boy?" he said, laying his hand caressingly on the delicately veined neck.

At the sound of his master's voice and the touch of his hand the horse was comforted, though not wholly quieted. Then Thorne saw what in his abstraction he had not noticed before. It was one of those peculiar nights which sometimes follow a day that has been all sunshine and gladness, when all nature has been joyous and bright. But a great change comes. The night falls softly and restfully, but the calmness that accompanies it is unnatural. There is something eerie in the twilight which creeps over the arch that was so beautiful a short time before. And when the full darkness of night comes at last, it is filled with an awesome, forbidding gloom. The stars at first may shine with an unwonted brilliancy, but they soon lose their light. The small ones disappear altogether, and the larger ones show only here and there, through a gloomy haze. And this darkness, there is something wonderful about it. It is full of strange shadows. The trembling mists make moving shapes of inanimate things. In strange places and out of nothing start flitting shades, which fade away again as swiftly as they take form. The air seems alive with voices murmuring, whispering to us in a language we cannot understand.

There is something unexplainable in the feeling that comes over one at such a time. It is a strange spell, an unnatural loneliness.

The horseman waited long on the lonely hill. The weird night had a fascination for him. It fitted his mood. Life in the valley had grown still when he turned his horse's head homeward. The barking of a dog came up through the darkness. A wind out of the west beat against him as he rode down the hill. The village was quiet and the lights were out. The white mist wrapped as in a wet sheet the clump of willows by the bridge, and the beat of his horse's hoofs on the wooden planks sounded as the tramp of a troop through the unnatural, awesome darkness.

The next morning but one Mr. Thorne again dismounted at Miss Steyne's gate. Miss Price was seated on the porch; at her invitation he dropped into a chair and sat chatting till the young mistress made her appearance. She had been in the garden, and came up the front steps, meeting her visitor with the easy grace of manner peculiar to her, saying just the right words of welcome. She wore a cool, pale lawn of a yellowish tint, which brought out and intensified the beauty of the nut-brown hair and the soft brown eyes so pure and true. So altogether lovely was she that, unimpressible as Thompson Thorne was where women were concerned, he drew in his breath sharply; but the sound was smothered behind the heavy moustache, as he rose and took the fair hand held out to him in welcome.

There are women and women, he thought sadly, as he looked at her. A small mocking voice within

seemed whispering to his consciousness, "What is that to you, Tom Thorne?"

There was a tightening of the muscles about the mouth, an ominous flash of the dark eye, conquered as quickly as it came, and his hand brought from the inner breast pocket of his coat a paper, and he walked over to where Margaret stood.

"I have with me the right-of-way deed for your signature, Miss Steyne, and I believe you will find it satisfactory.

"I feel sure that you have made it as it should be," she replied.

"Yes, it is as it should be; but when you have read it over, if it is not quite clear to you, please say so, and I will explain all difficulties;" which he did, standing by her side as she read.

The conditions proved satisfactory to Margaret, and also to Miss Price, upon whose good judgment and strong, practical sense Margaret greatly relied in all matters, whether domestic or financial.

"If you do not wish to use the money," said Thorne, "you would better send the cheque I give you to your lawyer at Richmond, to be deposited to your credit."

"Yes, I suppose that is the right thing to do," she replied.

They had entered the library and stood by the old secretary, now thoroughly womanly in its dainty appointments, and sweet with the delicate odor of evanescent perfume which permeated its belongings.

"I have been thinking further," he said, "of that deposit along the bluffs down there. I have a friend who is a practical geologist. He is to be in Rich-

mond soon, if he is not already there ; and I am going to write him to come up to visit me here, as I want greatly to see him and cannot possibly leave at this time. Should he come, we will make an examination of those bluffs."

"I thank you for your kind interest," said Margaret, "but hope that you may enjoy a visit from your friend, with or without discoveries. Gabriel is preparing to go right on with his festivities. Who would you suppose he has invited to be his guests ?" she asked smiling.

"I am sure I could not guess, but on a chance would say it was not any of the station negroes," he returned.

"And you would be right. His invitations extend only to Miss Price and myself, and I believe your name is on his list."

"It is an invitation I shall have to refuse, I am afraid, as I am obliged to go to the other end of the line. Will you say to the old fellow that I am sorry I cannot accept his hospitality ?" and with a friendly good-bye he went down the walk and mounted his horse, which at a touch on the rein struck into a long, swinging gallop.

The straight, supple figure looked well in the saddle.

"He must have been in the army," said Margaret. "No other men ride as do cavalrymen."

Miss Price's knitting lay idle in her lap. She, too, was looking at the fast-disappearing horseman. She watched him out of sight. Then, with a decisive little nod of her head in the direction he had gone, she said in her concise way, "I like him."

Margaret looked at her friend, wondering not a little at the strength of her words. For Miss Price possessed acute perceptive faculties, and her insight into the character of people, and her judgment of them, Margaret had found to be startlingly keen and just.

"Why do you like Mr. Thorne, Rebecca?" she asked presently.

"Why do I like him? Well, now, I don't know that I can take him to pieces and analyze him as you would a plant," she said, looking brightly at her young friend over her glasses. "But, to begin with, he has good manners, is a handsome man, and knows how to ride a horse."

"Rebecca, I will left you off. You have already exceeded my wildest expectations," laughed Margaret.

"There is something in the man's personality that attracts me to him; something that tells me he has missed the best thing in life. He is not a happy man; yet he will never be a bad man, for his instincts are good. He has a strong, sympathetic nature, which he is repressing. He seems to be simply enduring, and his powers of endurance are wonderful," said Rebecca thoughtfully. "Yet a time of reckoning must come to such natures. They cannot always live so; they cannot, and they do not."

Margaret was not a little startled by her friend's earnest words and grave manner.

"And what then?" she asked.

"Then, when the human heart can bear no more, deliverance comes. And may it come soon to him," she added fervently.

"Do you mean," asked Margaret with earnest eyes, "that the hardship, whatever it may be, is removed, taken out of our lives; that we are released from it?"

"I believe that rest, even compensation, comes to us in some form. Either the sorrow is removed or, through a merciful God, the power to suffer is taken from us."

Margaret, for the moment, did not speak; a sweet thoughtfulness came into the brown eyes. At length with a faint sigh on her lips she looked at her companion and said:

"I thank you, Rebecca, more than I can express, for those words. I shall never forget them, and should great trouble or suffering ever come to me, they will help me to bear it more patiently and hopefully."

"God grant trouble of that kind may never come to you!" prayed Rebecca Price silently in the depths of her heart, for this girl was very dear to her. With her warm sympathy, her genial, loving ways and responsive nature, she had brought such brightness and sweetness into the lonely, repressed life of Miss Price as she had not dreamed could come to her in this world.

IX.

THE MOONLIGHT MEETING.

SEVERAL days of rainy weather following each other in succession caused a postponement of old Gabriel's proposed chicken bake until a week had passed, and now through the dusk there showed a great red flare on the side of the bluff hedging in the narrow valley. To the fanciful mind it might be the sacrificial altar of some strange heathen God. The figures which passed before and about, now upright, now stooping and turning, now plucking themselves back from the flames, with changing postures and swayings of the body, might fitly be the victims for the sacrifice. It was but the prosaic Gabriel and Hagar engaged in preparing the long-deferred feast.

They had been there for some time, and the supper was almost ready when the guests were seen coming along the path, Miss Steyne's white dress showing plainly in the moonlight some distance away. Her companion in more sober raiment was Miss Price, who carried on her arm a shawl, remembering that Margaret might later on feel the dew in her thin dress.

Following the two ladies, came a dark spot, an uncanny, eerie object, which for a time would keep steadily along, and then just as suddenly drop behind, and in gruesome silence go through a perfect whirlwind of gyrations. It was the little

black maid whom Miss Steyme had added to her establishment within the past week. She was a demure-appearing child enough, almost stolid-looking at times; and, what was peculiar in one of that race, she seldom smiled. Miss Steyne thought there were undeveloped possibilities in the girl; that she was not really stupid, only new and strange, a condition which would wear off.

"No," hazarded Miss Price, when appealed to for an opinion, "I do not think her stupid; on the contrary; but," with a grim smile, "I reckon you've got about what you wanted; we will wait and see."

And they were coming to know that, though in a way obedient and respectful to her superiors, the little maid was developing into as likely an imp of mischief as could well be imagined, one of the kind who, when she had done a mischief, left you tantalizingly in doubt as to whether or not she knew that it was a mischief. Miss Price chanced to turn and look back.

"Good gracious, Margaret," she exclaimed, "see there, if that child isn't somersaulting along that narrow path."

True enough; she was coming along like a wagon wheel, over and over, with perfect indifference to the danger to life and limb. She may have seen that she was observed, for she instantly uprighted herself and walked along with the most fitting propriety, the small tight braids of wool, which stood out vertically around her head, nodding sociably at each other. The two ladies went on without saying anything to the reckless little acrobat.

"The possibilities are developing at a pretty fair rate, it would seem," observed Miss Price. "She would just as soon walk on her head now as on her feet. She will break her neck some day. What can we do with her?"

"I do not know," said Margaret laughing. "If she were going to break her neck, I probably shouldn't know of it in time to prevent her."

"Have we kept you waiting, Gabriel?" his mistress inquired.

Gabriel hastened to protest that he was just now ready. He had made seats for the ladies by piling up rocks, on top of which he placed large pieces of the shaly black rock, and on these a folded blanket. Hagar had brought sandwiches and a bottle of her currant wine down from the house, to crown the feast.

"Why, this is delightful!" exclaimed Margaret, "I had not thought it could be so nice down here."

Her words of praise were very sweet to the old man, who in his heart had enthroned his young mistress as the one perfect being he had ever known, and to merit her approval was the ambition of his life.

Hagar, taking hold of the long iron handle, drew from the coals the peculiar-looking vessel in which she had cooked the chicken. It was something like a common frying pan, but much deeper, being fitted with an iron cover or lid which extended over the edge of the vessel.

"What do you call that, Hagar?" inquired her mistress, regarding curiously the odd-looking object.

"Dat's de Pilgrim-pot, missus."

"But why do you call it that?"

"Because Massa Henry say de Pilgrim Faders don' use it to cook in, an I doan' kno' any oder name fer it."

It was what Miss Price called an old-fashioned Dutch oven, such as she remembered to have seen in her New England home. They put them down on the wide stone hearth of the wood fireplace, and raking the hot embers high around them, brazed, baked, or stewed, as they desired.

"And when you put in your chicken," she said, "with plenty of butter and sprigs of parsley, there isn't anything to compare with that kind of cooking that I know of. It stands to reason that new things can't always be best."

Old Gabriel's supper was indisputable proof of the correctness of Miss Price's judgment, for it was as dainty a dish as the four-and-twenty blackbirds set before the king.

The little black maid came at last and seated herself quietly on the outermost fragment of a ledge of rock half way up the bluff, where, outlined against the sky, she looked like some sable bird of prey ready for instant onslaught or flight, as fancy led. Suddenly slipping from her perch she hopped down the steep bluff with the agility of a chamois-hunter, and stood looking off down the miniature valley with apparently no object or interest. Then she lifted her hand, a curious way she had of attracting the attention of her mistress.

"What is it, Axem?" Margaret asked, chancing to see the signal.

"Dar's enemies in de camp," she said.

"Enemies! What do you mean, child? Are you dreaming?" her mistress exclaimed.

"Whar's de enemies? Jes' show em t' me, jes' show 'em!" demanded old Gabe, getting briskly to his feet and shading his eyes with his two hands, as he bent his body rigidly forward and peered cautiously beyond the circle of light in all directions; but not a shadow rewarded his careful survey, and with a look of relief his hands dropped to his sides.

"Dar haint no pusson 'roun'. Hit's jes' youn's tricks," he declared, turning threateningly on the little harbinger of evil.

"You 's too ole an blin', ye can't see noffin'," she retorted scornfully, with her nose in the air.

"Too ole to see, eh!" muttered the old man disdainfully as he returned to his duties.

"How old are you, Gabe?" It was Miss Price who asked the question.

"I's pushin' fifty, missus," he answered respectfully, "but I can see a niggah es fur'z ennybody," he added.

"'Taint niggahs," spoke out the small black oracle.

"No, 'taint nobody, dat's what—" began Gabe, when a friendly halloa from the top of the bluff effectually ended the dispute, and brought them all to their feet.

"Halloa, Gabriel! Is that you down there? May we come down?"

"My goodness! It's Mr. Thorne!" exclaimed Miss Price, looking hurriedly around as though she seriously contemplated trying to hide.

In truth she was most thoroughly chagrined at

being caught on such a lark by Mr. Thorne and no telling who else, and she reflected on her supreme folly in doing anything so strange. Margaret rather enjoyed the situation, all the more because Miss Price was so flustered. There is a certain pleasure in transcending the ordinary rules a little, without violating them, that gives piquancy and flavor to such events.

Two figures were silhouetted against the sky, as Margaret saw when she stepped out of the circle of light. She had recognized Mr. Thorne by his voice alone, and called up a cordial invitation to him to join them.

As Margaret's clear, sweet voice floated up from below, the man who stood by Thompson Thorne's side grasped his shoulder with a convulsive clutch.

"Heavens, Tom!" he exclaimed, "whose voice is that? Who is down there?"

And with a stride Paul Grey was on the edge of the bluff, looking down to where Margaret Steyne stood in the light of the fire, her bright face upturned toward him, her soft white gown gathered full in one hand. It was a picture to stir an artist's soul, and what was its power over the man who stood on the ledge above? He did not speak, but silently stretched out his arms toward the woman as though he would gather her to his heart; then they fell at his side.

Thorne, silent from sheer surprise, stood looking at his friend. They were not strangers, then, these two, and how much more they were to each other, only they knew.

A strange feeling pressed upon him, numbing his

senses. A weight was across his eyes. The sound of his friend's voice came faintly to his ear, yet he knew with a distinctness that was pain, that he was saying in tones that were impatient with joy :

"Margaret Steyne? Margaret? Why did you not tell me, Thorne, that she was here?—that it was to her you were bringing me?"

Thorne took his cigar from between his lips and looked at his friend, and his words came slowly, as with an effort :

"I did not know that I had not mentioned her name to you. I had not thought—how should I know—know that-- But we must go down," he said, with sudden decision.

He had pulled himself together with a wrench that hurt, and flinging his cigar impatiently from him, said "Come!" and, followed by Grey, he let himself down over the edge of the bluff, sending a light artillery of the loose, shaly stones clattering into the valley below.

Margaret stood in the circle of the fitful light made by the fire, waiting for them. Thorne was first and shook hands with her, enjoying covetously the short moment that was his ; the moment which he felt was stolen from that other happiness which was awaiting her within the sound of her voice, the touch of her hand. Then, with cordial voice and manner, he said :

"I have brought you, all-unknowing, an old friend, Miss Steyne," stepping aside as he spoke ; and Margaret Steyne and Paul Grey were face to face.

Surprise for a moment kept her silent. Then, with a pleased friendliness, she put out her hand,

and it was her own calm, sweet voice, without a tremor in it, which said :

"I am glad to see you, Professor Grey."

"Say, I am glad to see you, Paul ; " and the grave face of Paul Grey was pale with emotion and resolve. He leaned toward her, his eyes searched hungrily the sweet face of Margaret Steyne, as he awaited breathlessly her reply.

Another pair of dark, passionate eyes, under cover of the darkness, watching keenly the changing face of the woman, saw that she shrank from meeting Paul Grey in this attitude, though the hesitation was slight and so quickly controlled that it might have been thought merely natural embarrassment by one less observant than Thorne. That Paul Grey was Miss Steyne's friend, Thorne was glad, on second thought, for it bridged all social difficulties and brought him a possibility of friendship with her. He was no longer a stranger and unknown.

"I am glad to see you, my friend," she said, in the same cordial tones she had used before ; and withdrawing the hand which Paul Grey released with a lingering touch, she drew him forward to where Miss Price stood.

"This is one of my old friends from the North, Rebecca, Professor Grey." To him she said, "Miss Price is the best friend I ever had, the very best a lonely, homeless girl could have."

And then Miss Price, with the laudable intention of smoothing out the ruffled plumage of her dignity, went on to explain how they had thought it better they should accept Gabriel's invitation and come

down here than that he should bring strange colored people on to the place.

"So Rebecca had the kindness to consent," said Margaret; "she is a martyr, and yet I believe she had serious thought of running away when you discovered us;" at which they all laughed.

"But Gabriel there is waiting to give you some supper," said Margaret, suddenly remembering her hospitality.

The gentlemen declined with many thanks to the old colored people, which Thorne went over and delivered in person. They had arrived on the late train, he said, taken their supper, and come out to smoke and walk in the moonlight, most fortunately in this direction.

But they drank the health of the ladies in some of Hagar's wine. Then Gabriel, under Thorne's directions, spread the blankets on the ground a little way along the bluff, away from the heat of the fire, and the four friends grouped themselves comfortably to enjoy the moonlight.

"Margaret, will you not have your shawl?" Miss Price was prone to be apprehensive of damp in all kinds of weather.

"Allow me;" and Paul Grey, taking the light wrap from Miss Price, would have placed it about Miss Steyne's shoulders.

"No, do not," she protested, putting up her hand; and with a dexterous little twist of the wrist she had taken the shawl out of his hands and laid it on the ground at her side farthest from him.

"There is no dew to-night, Rebecca; it is simply perfect; do not worry about me."

"How do you think you would like camping out, Miss Price?" questioned Thorne.

"I don't know, I have never tried it in any shape; I might learn to like it in time."

"You never would," asserted Margaret; "you are much too orthodox; you would be altogether miserable."

"While you?" said Thorne interrogatively.

"While I should like it," she said.

"Yes, I believe you would."

"I do not deny my bohemian tendencies," she protested. "Under favorable conditions I am most certain to indulge them, and when I do I always feel that I am getting just so much extra enjoyment out of life."

"Yes," he said. It was half an assent and half an interrogation, and Margaret amiably responded to the interrogation.

"Much as we feel when we have received a letter and read it, and then unexpectedly discover some writing down the sides or across the top of the sheet."

"Be logical, if you can, and explain," said Thorne; "I am interested."

"Is that generous?" she asked, and laughed with him. "You see," she went on, "they are not the things they *must* say to us—the necessary things. Those are put in the body of the letter. The additions are the things they *want to* say to us, the bloom on the clover, you know."

"Do you think that is distinctively a woman's feeling about those afterthoughts or marginal notes?" Thorne persisted.

"Your question can be answered more easily and certainly from a man's point of view," she returned.

"How is it, Professor?" asked Thorne, adroitly shifting the responsibility of a reply from his own shoulders to those of his friend.

Professor Grey turned from his conversation with Miss Price.

"What is it? I did not hear," he said, bringing to the subject a grave attention wholly disproportionate to the importance of the point under discussion.

Margaret remained silent, resolved that Mr. Thorne should make his own explanations; and there was a sound of amusement in his voice as he said:

"Do you like to receive letters, Professor, with postscripts, addenda, and that sort of thing at the bottom and up and down the sides of the sheet, a sort of aftermath, you know?"

"No," the Professor answered gravely, "I do not think I should like them; they would be troublesome to read. I do not often get a letter of that kind; in fact, I hardly ever get such a one; if I remember rightly I never did," he asserted positively.

"Are you satisfied, Miss Steyne," asked Thorne.

"I? I disclaim the question or any responsibility for it," she replied, smiling; yet it was with a faint reproof in her voice that she said in a lower tone, "If you were in the army, Mr. Thorne, how did you fight?"

"Fairly, I hope," he answered more seriously, and turning to his friend, said:

"We were trying, Grey, to determine a point

entirely outside of personal matters, and I was wanting to turn on a side-light."

"And the moonlight got into your brain," suggested Professor Grey.

"Yes, set it down to the moon and consider me weakly susceptible, if you will. But have you ever thought that the moon may have more effect, more positive influence on the human family than we are in the habit of supposing?"

"No," replied the Professor; "I have not thought about it particularly; I mean in a scientific way."

"Who is that little black girl I notice with you, Miss Steyne," Thorne asked somewhat irrelevantly; "one of Gabe's relatives?"

"No, I beg of you, spare Gabe's feelings," she said, "for he is firmly convinced that Axem came to this earth direct from the evil one. How she comes to be here is, that I have taken her for my maid. I selected one untrained, as I preferred to train her myself."

"Well, you've got a little savage, pure and simple. Do you know we should not have found you but for her?"

"How so?" she asked.

"She was back on the upland above the bluff, running like the wind, flinging up her arms in wild gestures to the moon, and dancing with strange postures like any savage in his voodoo worship. It's the full moon that makes them wild. We saw her, and at first could not make out what it was, and followed until she disappeared over the bluff; then we saw your light."

"Coming back to the effect of the moon upon the

human race," said the Professor, "why should it differ with different people? Its effect on the physical life can only be the same with all people."

"Yes, so far as we can measure, it may be," said Margaret. "But just how far the mental has to do with the physical we cannot know. I believe the African race are more susceptible to its influence because they do not reason or resist. It is a feeling with them, and they yield to it—a feeling which is born in them; a bit of the wild, free life of savage Africa which is their inheritance and will only die with the race."

Thorne looked across the table and with a smile said: "Ah, Miss Steyne, you are trampling rough-shod over some of Grey's most cherished beliefs. You do not know that he says it is against reason and civilization to believe that the African, born here amid the environments of civilization and religion, should not shortly be emancipated from his inherited tendencies, and become even as his white brother. What do you think of his theory, Miss Price?"

"I think that a closer acquaintance with the race would lead him to question its correctness.

"It seems to me," said the Professor earnestly, "that under the changed conditions, with opportunities for education, and with freedom to follow out the thoughts so inculcated, we might naturally expect such results. Why should we not?"

"Commend him to the study of your little maid, Miss Steyne," said Thorne; "he has a subject at hand."

"I am sure he will find her an interesting subject," said Margaret; "I find her so."

"About how many generations is she removed from Africa?" asked Professor Grey.

"I should say four at least, as her grandparents told me they were born in Louisiana. She lived with them. But I will inquire further when I have opportunity," she said.

"Possibly you have found for me an exceptional case for study," ventured the Professor. "However, I shall pursue it unflinchingly, according to opportunity."

"And I will do what I can to help you, Professor Grey," said Margaret cordially, "for you have aroused the demon of investigation in me. We will take heart, too, from remembering that our little 'study' was born a slave and not free."

At the sweet friendliness of her words, the blood surged through Paul Grey's veins joyfully, and the sound of it was in his voice when he spoke.

"Thank you!" He turned to his friend: "You have done me an inestimable favor, Thorne, in making Miss Steyne my ally. I shall study the characteristics of the American Negro with the closest interest from now on."

"Do so," said Thorne; "and you will find that black blood comes back with deadly persistency."

The ladies and gentlemen returned to the house, leaving Gabe and his wife to finish their feast in their own good time. It was a glorious night for a walk; a sweet-scented, dewless night, with just the faintest caressing breath of air stirring on the upland, and the moonlight glorifying the earth.

"In such a night as this,
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees,
And they did make no noise—in such a night,
Troilus, methinks, mounted the Trojan walls,
And sighed his soul toward the Grecian tents,
Where Cressid lay that night."

They reached the house and stood talking at the gate. Thorne had looked at his watch by the light of the moon and was saying, "We will not stop this evening, but if you will wait here, Grey, I will go in and strike a light for Miss Price;" and the two walked up the path together.

"How did you know that I would not like to go into the house alone and make a light?" Miss Price asked.

"I never knew a woman who did not feel that way," he said. "Did you?"

"Well, you understand women pretty well, not to be a married man, however you came by your knowledge," declared Miss Price.

"I am married," he said briefly.

That was all, and Miss Price, realizing the instant it had escaped her that her remark was little short of an impertinence, remained silent with not a thought beyond her own stupidity.

He lighted the candles in the library in silence, and went through with her to the back entrance; the fastenings were secure.

"You are all right," he announced, when they had returned to the library. But in answer to Miss Price's thanks, he said: "You will pardon my speaking of it, but I do not think that leaving your house unguarded is quite a safe thing to do. There

are a good many turbulent characters about the village, though petty thieving seems to have been their only offense so far."

"You do right to speak of it; I've been careless," she said; and she looked kindly at the straight, slim figure standing over by the table.

He had taken a cigar from his pocket and stood jabbing the end of it with his pocket-knife. He was thinking of the two they had left by the gate, in the moonlight.

He shall have his chance, he was telling himself. At best it's hard lines for him. Yes, it's hell for a man to have such a woman as that before him and lose her. But she is right in this. Her happiness first; it is her birthright; it is every one's birthright. Heavens! how many sacrifice it recklessly!

For a moment Thompson Thorne came face to face with himself, for one instant he looked down into his heart and shrank from what he saw in in its depths. One look, one moan, and the pendulum swung back; the beat had not been lost, mind ruled again, but the strong, flexible hand sent the chair on which it rested roughly out of the way, as he stepped out on the veranda. Almost at once he turned and coming back said to Miss Price with his usual manner:

"We will made an examination of those bluffs to-morrow. Professor Grey is the geologist I spoke to you about. Will you kindly tell Miss Steyne of our intention, and ask her to send Gabriel down in the morning, if he can be spared, as we shall need him?" And going down the walk they joined the two at the gate, and said good-night.

Miss Price felt that she had judged aright when she said of Mr. Thorne that something had gone wrong in his life, that he was not getting the best out of it. Down on the road was a flare of light which went up to Throne's face shielded in the hollow of his hand, and she knew that he was lighting a fresh cigar.

"How a man will smoke--when—he feels like it!" she said, with the air of not having said what she started out to say. Nor had she, but Margaret had not observed, and the odor of the cigar trailed back to where the two women stood in the soft light of the full moon.

"Who is this friend of yours, Margaret?" Miss Price was asking. "He has had something to do with your past life."

"Yes," answered Margaret frankly and unhesitatingly; "I want to tell you about it. There is not much to tell, but I shall feel better when you know. He was Professor of Sciences in a college in an adjoining town during the last four years I was at the Seminary; I met him often, and——"

"And he took the opportunity to fall in love with you?" said Miss Rebecca, concluding the sentence over which Margaret hesitated.

"Yes, and honored me by asking me to be his wife," she said slowly.

"And you refused him?"

"Yes, I refused him. I was sorry about it, and am sorry still, for he is a man, I am sure, any woman might love with entire trust. A quiet, scholarly, high-minded gentleman, thoroughly wedded to his profession, not much given to ladies'

society, and it was unfortunate, sad even, that he should have made me his choice, for I could not marry him. Why, you ask? Because I could not love him."

"But why not?" insisted Miss Price, who was always able to give a reason for her feelings.

"I do not know. Set it down to lack of harmony, of temperament, or what you will. I felt that though he loved me, he would never be my friend in the broadest, fullest sense of the term. Those even, unimaginative natures are rarely sympathetic; and even sympathy is not enough. Some sympathy is maddening; it must have understanding. Do you know what I mean? It would be utterly impossible, it would be the death of the best part of me, to marry Paul Grey," she exclaimed, with a little shiver of feeling in her voice.

But Rebecca Price did not understand. She even found herself wondering in a vague way if Margaret might not sometime change her mind, if she were to see much of the Professor. She had seen people do that. He is very much in love with her, she soliloquized.

"Did you have any idea, Margaret," she asked presently, "who Mr. Thorne's friend was when he spoke of sending for him?"

"Not in the least. How could I? And I do not see how I could have prevented his coming if I had known," she said wearily. "I could not have told Mr. Thorne."

"No more you could, my dear girl; and do not make yourself unhappy about it; it will all come right," said Miss Price reassuringly.

"What a blessed comforter you are, Rebecca! I feel better already for talking to you. It is an old saying that a trouble shared is half gone;" and Margaret slipped her hand confidingly into that of her friend.

But when Paul Grey made his confession to his friend that night as they walked home through the moonlight, and asked for comfort, his friend had no comfort for him. Sympathy he gave in unstinted measure, but he had watched the face of the woman whom Paul Grey loved, when she greeted him. He saw no glint of love-light in those clear, candid eyes; and knew that her pulse beat not one throb faster for his presence.

"She was kind to-night," urged Paul almost hopefully; "maybe she means to relent; she may have changed."

Thorne could have smiled at the simplicity of the man, at the slender thread upon which he would weave a hope, He pitied the weakness, yet honored the man that he had it. To hold out a hope to him now would be as cruel as false, and he remained silent; but his friend would not have it so; he must reply, and he said gently:

"I have known Miss Steyne so short a time and seen so little of her that I cannot speak certainly; but I would take her to be a woman who, when she once made up her mind about a thing of that kind, would not be likely to change it. I am sorry for you, my friend;" and he laid his hand on Paul Grey's shoulder with a touch as gentle as a woman's. "But better far, aye, a thousand times better,

never to marry, than to marry a woman who does not love you."

"You do not count the chance that I might win her love afterwards?"

"No; a man ought not to dare that. You are happier now than you would ever be again, did such a thing happen. You are devoted to your work; few can be so wholly content as you. It is your nature to be even and moderate in your ambitions, yet you have made such rapid progress as must tell you that you have within you the elements of success. You may reach what you set out to reach if you do not fling it away. Lytton says, 'No man or woman ever yet found fair play for heart or mind, who by hook or crook managed to marry the wrong person.' Heavens! how true it is!"

They were at the door of the inn; they said good-night and separated.

X.

PRACTICAL GEOLOGY.

NEXT evening Professor Grey and Mr. Thorne took tea with the ladies of Steyne House. They had been down at the bluffs the entire day, studying and classifying the formations. Gabriel, who had been with them, returning early, stopped with his tools on his shoulder at the front veranda to speak to his mistress.

"I dunno," he said, "jes' wha' all dey talks erbout, but de gen'lemen am mighty pleased at wha' dey fin' down dar in de bank; 'deed dey is, an' dey say my missus am berry fort'nit 'ooman, an I's proud, missus, to hab such cherkin news to tell yer."

"I appreciate your kind wishes, Gabriel, and we will all rejoice together in my good fortune, whatever it may be," she replied lightly, for she counted that Gabe's imagination was on an ignis-fatuus chase.

But when Professor Grey and Mr. Thorne had reported the result of their investigations, and she had received their hearty congratulations, she felt that she truly was a fortunate woman. Beneath the strata of slate which had attracted their attention, they had found a thick vein of bituminous coal, which Professor Grey had identified as the celebrated Pittsburg seam of the upper coal measures

running from Pennsylvania into Virginia, and varying from three to twelve feet in thickness—coal highly adapted for general purposes. This made her estate valuable, doubly so since the line of railroad would make the coal available in the market at once, did she wish to have it operated.

An interest was being awakened in the coal-fields of Virginia at this time. Syndicates of Northern capitalists were coming into the state buying largely to hold; a few were preparing to develop its unknown wealth, but it was the beginning of a new era. As a necessary step they were providing railroad facilities.

It was with one of the strongest of these companies that Mr. Thorne was connected, and in whose interest he was in Virginia. He had been selected for this important position because of his fine business capabilities and his integrity of character. He possessed to the fullest degree the confidence of the members of the company, many of whom were his personal friends, and when he had said to Margaret Steyne, "Our company will accept my valuation of the property," it was not said in a boastful spirit, but because he knew they would do so.

"I am grateful to you, Mr. Grey, and to you, Mr. Thorne," said Miss Steyne cordially, "for the great service you have rendered me to-day. But since you have been so good as to discover all this wealth for me, I am afraid you will have to tell me how to manage about it. I have not been educated to this sort of thing. It is the traditional elephant over again." She had turned her eyes instinctively

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toward Thorne as she ceased speaking, and it was he who answered.

"If you desire my opinion," he said, "I will give it freely. But you have a brother, perhaps, or some relative whose judgment and advice you would rely upon, in undertaking anything like this?"

"I have no brother, no relative in the world, that I know of; no one upon whom I have a claim. I must rely upon strangers when it comes to things of this kind."

Her hearers felt the sadness of her words, but she gave them no opportunity to remark, but went on speaking in the quiet manner usual with her.

"I shall indeed be grateful for your opinion, Mr. Thorne," she said; and added in a lighter tone, "you will have no preconceived conclusions to controvert; the field is barren, not even the stalks of a past crop of ideas infest the soil."

"I should have no apprehension, for you are not radical in your tendencies," he said. "First of all, then," he began, "I would say that you have too much land lying idle and unproductive to be a good landlord. If I were you I should sell off fifty or even a hundred acres from the lower end of the plantation, and improve the rest. But sell the surface only, and reserve the coal. On no condition would I sell a part of the coal. Sell it all, or hold it all and have it worked on a royalty, if a conpany can be had to take it that way. Think over what I have said. I will confer with our company, and when I return I may have a proposition to lay before you for your consideration, though our company prefers to buy coal lands outright."

They were seated about the tea table, when Miss Steyne renewed the conversation :

"I feel that you have given me good advice about my land, Mr. Thorne, and I shall remember it. You and Miss Price agree admirably in one particular."

"And in what particular, may I ask?"

"She has been protesting vehemently—that is, the New England half of her has—against the non-productiveness of the land, while the Southern and more indolent half falls in with the existing state of things."

"Well, now, the doctrine of 'accepting things as they are' has been so unceasingly dinned into the ears of the Southern people since the war, it would be small wonder if our energies became entirely paralyzed, for a text constantly repeated and constantly heard does have its effect, though you may smile," declared Miss Price.

"It was Napoleon Bonaparte, was it not, who said that a people are ruled by epigrams?" observed Thorne.

"It was Napoleon who said 'When you don't know what to do, do nothing,'" returned the professor, at which they all laughed.

"Oh!" exclaimed Margaret; "would not the ashes of Napoleon arise in protest against words of his being quoted in extenuation of inactivity,—worse, as slayers of ambition? But I am convinced that not even Napoleonic epigrams would suffice to restrain Rebecca's activity. She is only lulling her conscience to rest now, with promise of a more vigorous and aggressive future."

Miss Price smiled, and Margaret's amusing analysis proceeded :

"I have wondered not a little how she is to satisfy her two natures, how reconcile them."

"And circumstances do not compel a decision?" said Thorne.

"No, or there could be no choice in the matter. I am wondering," Margaret said, "whether or not a double nature would require a double conscience, and if so, would they not always be arrayed one against the other, and so make one uncomfortable? How is it, Rebecca?" she asked, turning a quizzical look on her old friend.

"Do I act as though I was uncomfortable in my mind?" asked the matter-of-fact spinster, who was well able to take care of herself in a conversational skirmish.

Margaret laughed : "No, my friend, you do not. But in time I hope to see you wholly Southern in temperament and habit, and entirely comfortable in consequence. To eradicate or smother the demon of activity in your nature, Rebecca, shall be one of my aims in life."

"You will find the transforming of a New England temperament into a Southern one a difficult thing to do. Inherited traits, strengthened by habit and environment, are not easy to overcome or supplant," said the professor gravely.

Margaret looked across the table at Thorne, and there was an answering smile in the eyes which met hers. The professor's sudden change of front was something of a surprise to both.

"How long do you think, Miss Price, it would

take in a wholly Southern atmosphere to eradicate from your nature the New England tendencies to thrift and industry which are your inheritance?" Thorne asked, turning to Miss Price with a new interest in his voice. He liked her straightforward replies, for she never shirked an answer, but faced it squarely ; important or trivial, it mattered not ; so now she answered with honest deliberation :

"I don't believe it could ever be done. I like to work, I like to manage things, and I like to manage people. But there are things which would be harder for me to give up than my habit of industry."

"Will you tell us what they are?" inquired the professor.

"Well, now," she began, the preliminary words betraying her New England origin, "for one thing, my religious customs and beliefs, the way in which I worshiped. I could never rightly worship in any other way than I was brought up to worship, nor could I change my belief."

"You think that one's religious belief is the hardest thing to change?"

"I do," she replied. "I don't believe we ever get very far away from the teaching and beliefs of our childhood, our first faith and worship. It is a part of our way of life. And the way we spend our holidays ; they would not be holidays to me unless observed as in my young days."

"Miss Price acknowledges to being wholly New England on Sabbaths and holidays," declared Margaret. "It is clear, Professor, that you can claim your countrywoman uncontaminated by Southern habits of living."

"Because she has found here nothing better, nothing higher, else she had not adhered to them. She would have embraced a better, a purer religion had she found it; accepted a higher civilization had it environed her," the professor insisted.

"Without fail?" questioned Thorne.

"What is true of tribes and nations is true of individuals; and history tells us," continued Grey, "that when transplanted into a more civilized country they embrace the beliefs and adopt the customs and habits of the higher civilization, so that with time and opportunity they assimilate and become one people, casting off the old life as a garment they have outgrown. You must believe that."

"What do you think, Miss Steyne?" asked Thorne.

"Of the assimilation of races?"

"Yes."

"I have come to think that we may be very greatly deceived in the results we count on from such association. The weak race may in the small things of outward life, such as manner and dress, conform as nearly as possible to their new surroundings; but in the more important things, in the heart of them, they do not to the degree commonly supposed. This is particularly true of the African people, who are great imitators of what pertains to the outward man. Yet three hundred years of contact with the habits and environments of English and American civilization have not banished the fetich, the voodoo, and the belief in the power to conjure, or the potency of the amulet against witchcraft and disease. The grisgris is yet burned in front of the doorstep of a cabin to curse an enemy.

The descendants of the oldest known slaves have not become as civilized as they might, even though education was denied them. There seems to be a lack of something that does not bring out grand and noble traits in them. Is it stability the race lacks ? "

"That is about as near as it can be defined," said Thorne. "In proof of it, remove them from contact with the white race—even those who have had the highest civilization—and they take a leap backward into barbarism that would amaze the most sanguine."

"It seems hard to believe that education and example will do little or nothing for these people," insisted Professor Grey.

"You mistake my meaning. Education will do much for any people, but it will not eliminate the deep, strong race traits from their blood. You will think that you have accomplished it, but you cannot count upon it with any degree of certainty. The strongest may keep evidence of them under control ; they may not appear in one generation, but will crop out with redoubled force in the next. It is the uncertainty that is puzzling. I will give you a bit out of life that has come under my observation, and in a way has been connected with my own, which will prove to you that I am not talking wildly."

"I shall be glad if you will, Thorne ; for I shall know that it is true."

"I am a Southern man, by birth and education, having been born in Louisana. When quite young, as was the custom, I was given for my servant a mulatto boy called Jim. We grew up together, he

being constantly about me, except for the years that I was attending college. He was bright and intelligent beyond the ordinary servant. He had a fine figure, coupled with a handsome, agreeable face, and a manner that would do honor to a higher station. When the war broke out, Jim went with me through three years of it, my faithful servant and almost companion. At its close he went home with me. Shortly afterward he courted and married a pretty mulatto girl named Eliza, from an adjoining plantation, who had filled the post of seamstress and maid to the two young ladies of the family. She had been well instructed and brought up amid the refinement of an elegant home. Jim and Eliza were fitly mated and were a handsome couple. They had been taught to read and write, as many of the house servants in Louisiana were. When the first excitement over emigration to Africa broke out in our country, Jim and his wife, with two other young couples from near them, were among the first to join the expedition to that country, where they arrived all in good time. They had been there but a short time, however, when their wives voluntarily left them, and went to live with these savage men. Jim is now at home, I am told, without his wife."

"Astonishing!" ejaculated the professor. "But that certainly is an exceptional case. It must be," he reiterated, startled in spite of himself into a doubt of the position he had assumed.

"It is an exceptionally strong one, I own," said Thorne, "but it is true. You cannot count on any people—surely not on the African—getting away from and outgrowing his inherited traits. They

seem to have stronger blood, deeper, more tenacious race instincts and traditions, than almost any other people. They are a peculiar people, and you must pass your life among them to know them. How then are you going to educate well and direct wisely a people of whose nature and requirements you know nothing? You will expect too much. You will meet disappointment. There will be individual cases of success, but I speak of the race."

"You take a discouraging view of the matter," returned the professor. "In what points do you think we shall fail, if the word is not too strong?"

"You have removed all restraint from them suddenly, which was the worst possible thing you could have done for a people who have not been self-controlled. You have given them entire liberty, which they interpret as license. From this condition will come a steady decrease in their morals and industry. You will not meet this phase of the question seriously for years yet, not until the influence of the older men and women is destroyed or weakened and their numbers depleted by death; but it will come. You will have a younger generation of almost uncontrolled people, idle and impatient of restraint, who will resent the line of social demarcation drawn by the whites, and try by every means in their power to break down all racial lines, to sink all social distinctions."

"You mistake the temper and intelligence of the Northern people if you think they mean to encourage such aspirations or labor to such an end," declared Professor Grey. "And I hope, Thorne, that time will prove you an alarmist, a false prophet."

"I can honestly say with you, I hope so. But I repeat emphatically, you are counting far too much on what simply theoretical education will do for the African, the ex-slave. You persist in taking them seriously. You endow them with your sympathies, your resolution, your power to reason, and your desires. And they do not fit, but only bewilder and unsettle them. They are going to have their minds badly joggled on social questions."

"Politically they will be controlled?" remarked the professor interrogatively.

"Undoubtedly," promptly returned Thorne; "just as the many have been governed for all time by the few, all fine twaddle to the contrary notwithstanding; 'twere too unsafe otherwise. The bestowing the right of suffrage upon the negro when you did was a wrong to him as well as to the whites. It was a mistake all round. You'll be sorry some day that you did it."

"Miss Steyne, you are not radical, I happen to know. You have lived both North and South, and should be more able to see this question from an unbiased standpoint than either Thorne or myself. Will you not give us your views?" The professor had turned deferentially toward his hostess and waited..

"I know how earnestly you are laboring," she said, "and yet I can see how honestly you may blunder in the matter of directing and educating the freedmen. It is too late now to start right. The government, I have thought, would better have leased large tracts of land, which lay idle for years all through the South, and have furnished

labor for the negroes, with certain military restraint and protection, till the country had grown quiet and settled, and they could have learned what freedom meant, learned the true meaning of their changed condition. To take a helpless child from a sheltered home where it has never known a responsibility, and fling it out upon the world, may lead to its learning how to live decently, but it more often leads to pauperism and depravity. And what of the child's suffering? It was a cruel thing to do."

"You take up the humanitarian side of the question first," said Professor Grey.

"It is the side that I see most of, the side that presses upon me here. They must live, first of all; and they are getting wrong ideas of life, learning to live on charity instead of by the honest labor of their hands. Demoralization and education, true education, cannot go hand in hand. Am I not right?"

"You are wholly right," he returned warmly; "right in all that you have said. Our moral natures should be our first and greatest care."

"Save the present generation from vagabondage, would be Miss Steyne's shibboleth," said Thorne.

"Would it not be a good one?" she asked with a smile.

"Most excellent! Inscribe my name on your banner," he returned.

"How is it to be done? How are they to be saved from vagabondage?" It was the professor who spoke.

"Ah! we all have stumbled," said Margaret.

"But responsibility for themselves in health and sickness is a hard lesson for them to learn; how hard, you who know nothing of their ways or their natures will never understand. Slavery is contrary to natural right, and it had its misfortunes, its sins, but in sickness the slaves were cared for, and in old age they were not turned away to die of neglect. And a peaceful old age free from care is not the lot of all who are born free. But they are free now and must learn to live alone, and that should be the first education; and while we should be pitiful and patient, we should not pauperize them by unwise charity, nor teach them disaffection. We cannot afford to do it. Give them labor, and when they have done it, reward them fairly. And when we have done all this, give them schools for their children. The young are the only ones whom you can expect to benefit by the schools; the older people are too busy with the more pressing cares of life."

"Dear Miss Steyne, you have spoken wisely from your woman's heart, and your words will go with me always, pleading bravely the cause of the freed people, and they could have no more powerful advocate."

Professor Grey spoke feelingly, with a light in his eye that caused Margaret to endeavor a little nervously to turn the conversation into a more comfortable channel by saying:

"I fear I have not been as sympathetic with your view of this matter as you expected me to be, so I will turn you over to Miss Price, who always finds something comforting to say about everything."

"I shall be delighted, Miss Price," said the professor, turning with grave consideration.

Rebecca Price looked a little reproachfully at Margaret, but set about giving the professor as much encouragement as the subject and her conscience would permit:

"Mr. Thorne has said that you do not understand the peculiar nature and characteristics of this people, whom you are trying to direct and lead to prosperity, and I agree with him. Your greatest trouble and discouragement will come through your not understanding. He has told you much that only an observant, intelligent Southern man could tell you."

"That is unquestionably true; I do not forget that he speaks from knowledge, as you yourself are doing."

"You are like the boy who handles a musket and won't believe that it's loaded. But the old slaves will give you no trouble," she said. "You will find them a decent, well-behaved class, and our most helpful factor in the control of the younger element. Yet, learning responsibility for themselves, for their daily food even, will be hard for them. For to the negro living is largely a matter of amusement. He is a creature of large faith in the future, and no prudence for the present. You will need a plentiful supply of patience. As to their education, you have room for encouragement. They are not savages, they have already been given religious training and been taught habits of industry and good manners. Not a bad beginning, surely, but it will be remarkable if under the present conditions they retain it all."

The professor looked thoughtful, as though not quite sure that Miss Price's encouragement was encouraging. But in the next pause of the meal he returned to the subject.

"I want to ask you a question, Thorne," he said.

"As many as you like," replied his friend.

"Do you not believe that out of this chaos some condition will soon be born for a harmonious adjustment of the question, when the situation may solve itself satisfactorily to both races, where mutual recognition of the rights of each will be reached, whereby they can assimilate?"

"You should go to our wise statesmen with your question. They seem sanguine of finding such a solution."

"I will take your opinion now. I am sure to get theirs later."

"You are welcome to it for what it is worth. The chaos political and social is extreme enough, of a surety, to evolve strange situations and strange results as well, and we may expect them, yet that they will be satisfactory to both races is not to be expected. The negroes are now the nation's pets—of that part of it which is in power—but that stage will pass. The whole subject has been invested with a mass of sentiment which is the veriest bosh, and of which we shall have to rid ourselves before we can act intelligently. Then we shall doubtless try colonization and emigration many times over, but I have no faith in their success."

"Why not?" asked the professor. "I have looked upon emigration as the most likely solution of the matter. Great undertakings often fail at first."

"It will not answer, because it will not suit the negroes' purpose to emigrate. He does not love battle as does the white man, or victory for its own sake. He will never succeed as a pioneer; his views of life are too light-hearted. Besides, this is home to him. He is more an object of interest here than he could possibly be elsewhere, which counts with human nature. When he ceases to be an object of interest he will become an object of uneasiness. The increase in the race will be rapid. In a quarter of a century from now we shall be face to face with a race problem such as no other nation has had to deal with. We shall be willing to do anything then, but shall not be able to do anything, for the negro will have gotten to where he will demand not only full social equality and recognition, but the abolition of race lines."

"A demand we could not grant," promptly declared the professor. "Still, we cannot blame the negro that he desires such a condition, for it would be his elevation."

"It is a condition the black should not afford in a physical sense, for the mulatto does not have the strength and stamina of the white man, nor has he the physical endurance of the full-blooded black man."

"If what you say is true it would be the worst possible condition for us all. But they do not wish it; they are saying so right along. Their most intelligent leaders proclaim through press and pulpit that they have no such desire," insisted the professor.

"And do you believe them? Do you not know that deep down in the heart of every black man

and woman is the desire to be white, by the side of which all other desires fade and pale into insignificance? And this will strengthen with succeeding generations, fostered as it is by unwise marriage laws in many of the Northern states, and unwise school regulations. He may not openly demand absorption by the white race, through marriage, but he will never cease to hope for it, never cease to work for it, never lose sight of the ultimate end and aim. It is the ruling hope of his life. If he may not be white, his descendants may. The black woman will not raise a black child from choice, but a white one. The mulatto woman will not have a black man for her husband, but with cunning aims to trap some white man into marriage. They will fasten themselves upon the white race of this nation like leeches. It means in the end amalgamation, if the white race does not awaken to a sense of the danger in time." Thorne stopped abruptly. "I had not meant to say so much, Grey. You asked me a question and I have given you a dissertation."

The professor's elbow was on the table; he leaned toward the speaker in his interest.

"You have given me what I asked for," he said slowly—"your opinion, and I am your debtor for more than you know."

"Although not aggressive in argument, Thorne, while at college, always had the faculty of discovering a side of his own to every question and holding to it through thick and thin, and he has not changed," said Professor Grey to the ladies as they rose from the table and sought the veranda.

"Knowing my weakness you should not have precipitated a discussion," declared Thorne. "You are clearly to blame, Grey; I shall not trust you again."

The sun, a great red disk, was slipping behind the mountains. The birds stirred in the branches and under the eaves as they nestled down for the night. The old gray goose had brought her flock of staggering goslings up the narrow path to a higher knoll, where they ranged themselves in squatting line, one of their number being selected a sentinel. Then every other downy gray head was thrust under a downy gray wing, and silence reigned along the line. Question: How did the first goose learn military tactics?

"With your permission I will smoke," said Thorne to the ladies; and lighting his cigar he ran down the steps, and in the gathering twilight walked back and forth with his eyes on the unchanging sky.

Miss Price quitted her seat on the veranda and went down and joined him.

"There is a tree over there by the edge of the wood, Mr. Thorne," she said, pointing to a spot a hundred or so yards away, "which I should like your opinion about. It is a new kind to me. If we go now we shall have time to see it before dusk falls."

And the two set off toward the fast darkening wood line. The stranger proved to be a pecan tree, a little out of its common latitude. Mr. Thorne doubted if the nuts ripened. While they stood in the shadow of the tree, the cry of an owl broke the stillness.

"There he goes! I always like to hear him at this hour," said Thorne, turning his face toward the dark strip of wood. "He must be an old inhabitant of these grounds. It is not the first time I have heard him."

"Well now, how queer that you should like owls, too! Margaret is just daft over them, calling me out in the evenings to hear them; and you two people are the only ones I ever heard say they liked owls," declared Miss Price.

"That is strange; we must have been born under the same star." And a soft light came into the eyes of the man.

But Miss Price was thinking of the man and woman down on the veranda. She was a little sympathetic with the man. Not that she wanted Margaret to love him; no, she did not want that; but her kind heart was troubled for him, for how could he help loving her dear girl?

"Do you know Professor Grey well?" she presently asked of Thorne.

"Yes, I may say I do. We were classmates at college and saw a good deal of each other, and have done so since, when circumstances have permitted."

"I don't suppose he could have been very wild in his young days?" Miss Price ventured, hesitatingly, not feeling quite certain that she should ask the question.

"Wild!" exclaimed Thorne, struggling with a laugh he could not subdue at the vision of the sedate Grey in the role of the wild student.

"Certainly, no one could charge Grey with being

wild. He was discretion itself, I assure you. But you are seeking ground for our friendship?" he said, his tone half a question, "You think it strange that, with no similar tastes, no common ground of congeniality, we should yet have been friends. Now, what makes you think I was wild?" he asked, looking into the plain, severe face of his companion with an almost boyish enjoyment of the situation.

"I never said—" began Miss Price earnestly; then she stopped. "Well, young man, you get over a good bit of ground when you start out to do it." The corners of her mouth twitched with amusement as she finished.

Thorne laughed. "I shall not quarrel with your present estimate of me, nor with your belief in my past, Miss Price," he declared, "only don't think I was ever quite a reprobate."

"I know you wa'n't," she said, one of her pet Yankeeisms cropping out unexpectedly, as they often did in her earnest moments; "I know you wa'n't;" and she laid her hand kindly on the sleeve of his coat. "I am 'most twenty years older than you, and I have watched human nature too close to be easily deceived, closer than if I'd had a man of my own to be bothered about, I guess; and I would have trusted you then, and I trust you now," she declared positively.

How the true, sincere nature of this woman helped him, a man of the world who sometimes wearied of everything! This expression of kindly confidence touched him deeply. The strong hand closed over the soft, wrinkled one on his sleeve, and

to her surprise it was warmly and firmly tucked under his arm, and he measured his steps to her slower ones as they paced up and down.

"I thank you, my friend; I shall always call you that now. Your words have done me a world of good, but I have not told you what you wanted to know. I did not mean to shirk an answer, believe that. I knew Grey at college, as I have said, and liked him chiefly because I believed in his integrity of character and sincerity of purpose. I knew people whom he knew, which first brought us together. Almost too much of a bookworm, though, for this brutally practical world. Yes, he is a man a woman could safely marry, if she loved him; a man to be trusted, I believe, under almost any circumstances, which is more than I would say of many men."

"I am glad that you can speak so well of him," she said.

"You know that he loves Miss Steyne?" and Thorne's voice sounded cold as he asked the question.

"Yes, she told me about it last night. She says she is sorry they met again, for she cannot love him; though I cannot see why, for he is a fine-looking man."

Her companion's smile was hidden by the gathering shade.

"I am only afraid," she continued, "that Margaret will feel under obligations to him now, and that she must appear to him ungrateful. I wish somebody else had made the discovery down at the bluff."

Thorne stopped suddenly and looked at his companion. "I see how it is," he said, "and I am glad you spoke of it. Don't let her feel so for a moment, if you can prevent it. I will fix that. It shall be for me, for our company, that he has done this work. I will take care of that, remember," he added in a low tone.

His companion thanked him, and they had come up to the steps and into the presence of Miss Steyne and the professor.

To one of these two at least, their coming was welcome, and as Miss Rebecca passed by, Margaret reached out and touched her hand with a little caressing movement.

To Paul Grey nothing mattered now, he knew there was no hope for him, that there never would be, never had been ; and as the two friends walked together down to the village that night, he said sadly but with decision :

"You were right, Tom. I had not an inch of ground to stand upon. She is the only woman I have ever loved, and I shall never love another. I will go back to my work and—remember."

"No, don't take it that way, Grey," Thorne remonstrated ; "don't go now. Our company need just such a man for a time. I am convinced that we shall need the advice of a geologist in the selection of lands we contemplate buying farther on. The Virginia coal-fields are not the Pennsylvania coal-fields, I am finding out. You cannot be so certain of them. This is a new field, and we must move carefully in making investments in it. If it is work you want, live, interesting work, you can

find it right here with me, in the field, and you will feel better if you stay outside your close walls till cold weather drives you within. You can fit out here, and we will start to-morrow morning," he said heartily; and Grey did as his friend wished, and said no more about going North.

XI.

THE SECRET ROOM.

It was the morning that Gabriel went down to Winston after the mail. Miss Steyne had settled that they were to have their mail twice a week ; and this morning the old black man could be seen poking contentedly up the hill with the blue-jeans bag, held with a strap across his shoulder, in which he carried anything and everything, from a pair of hob-nailed shoes to Margaret's pet magazine, mopping his face with his bright bandana as he came. He searched the pouch, and bidding his mistress a pleasant good-morning, sat down on the step the better to facilitate his search for a letter, which he finally found and transferred to her hand.

Axem, the little black maid, stood watching him enviously the while, her restless bead-like eyes traveling quickly from one to the other.

"Why can't I get em?" she asked, pointing to the letter, "I c'n go down dar quicker'n you'ns c'n ; you'ns legs hain't good ; yo's ole, an' yo's slo'," she said, enumerating and exaggerating Gabriel's disabilities with evident relish.

"It's cos ye can't be trus'd, chile' ; ye ain't safe to do it," answered the old man, rising.

"I'd do it fur her certain," she said, nodding her small, woolly head toward her mistress.

"Mebbe ye c'n do it some time, chile' ; but it's

when ye gits to be moah angel-like dan ye is now, be shuah ob dat," muttered the old man admonishingly, as he took his way round to the kitchen door.

The little fury, wheeling herself into the path behind him, made up the most horrible faces at his back, while mimicking his walk.

Her mistress could with difficulty restrain her laughter, but with the air of not having seen, she bade her go find Miss Price and ask her to come out to her.

"Read this letter, Rebecca; it is from Lawyer Harris; it is an acknowledgment of the check sent, and a certificate of deposit from the bank from the same; read it and tell me what you think of it—of all of it."

"Well, I think," said Miss Price, after a careful second reading of the letter, "I think he is mighty curious about where that money came from. He does not quite ask you plain out where you got it, but he wants to know dreadful bad. I wouldn't put it a bit past him to come up from Richmond just to see about it, if he could only find an excuse. He is very anxious you should write to him for advice on the smallest things, and assures you it will be no trouble whatever."

"Yes; 'he lived but to help his friends' might fitly be his epitaph, suggested by that letter," returned Margaret smiling.

"And," continued Miss Price meditatively, "I am thinking he admires you, Margaret."

"Dont suggest such a thing, Rebecca, and don't, I entreat, get into the way of looking upon every

man who may come here as a probable lover," protested Margaret.

"I hope I shan't do anything of the kind," said Miss Price, "but it's either that, or else he wants to keep your business affairs entirely in his hands, and make you depend on him. I believe it's both. But that man loves power dearly, mark my words; and you will do well, Margaret, to learn all about your own business as soon as you can, and look after it too."

Miss Price had taken off her glasses and dropped them in her lap, a sure sign that she was a little disturbed.

"You may be sure I shall not send for him to come up, that his curiosity may be set at rest," said Margaret decidedly. "I owe him a goodly return for the selfish reticence he used toward me when he came first to see me to tell me of my cousin's death. He allowed me to wait for information about my inheritance, which he should have given me freely, and which was necessary for me to know. But seriously, Rebecca, I have had the same feelings about him. When Mr. Thorne returns, if he has a proposition for our consideration, I will send for Mr. Harris and consult him; until then he must do the best he can. I have no conscience where *his* peace of mind is in question."

"It's going to rain, I do believe," said Miss Rebecca.

Making a dab at her glasses she adjusted them and looked off across the valley to where the leaden clouds were crowding themselves sullenly together.

"I must go look for that hen's nest back in the

woods before it rains, for the varments will only get the biddies if they hatch out. And I ought to go up to the attic; I sent Hagar up there to sweep and dust up."

"Let me go look for the hidden nest," urged Margaret; "I will take Axem; she can find it."

"Yes, she can if she chooses to, but if you didn't want her to, she'd be more likely to do it. I never saw such a child in all my born days," declared Rebecca, "and I've seen a good many of them one way and another. What do you suppose she was doing this morning?"

"I should not try to guess, I am sure," said Margaret.

"You know how old Hagar hates bugs and spiders and such things; it seems kind of natural to her some way. Well, that young imp has found it out, and she went to the potato patch and got a lot of potato-bugs. She had them in her pocket as she sat on the doorstep as innocent as a spring lamb, and when Hagar's back was turned she would start one in at the doorway."

"Well, she certainly is original in her mischief," said Margaret, laughing heartily; "but what did you do?"

"I called her to me and made her take them out of her pocket, and asked her what she did it for. She said, 'Jes' ter see Hagar spry roun';'" and the sedate narrator smiled now as she had not dared to do then. "I'm tempted sometimes to think, as Gabe does, that she would be more at home down below; she hardly seems human. Well, I'll go now and see to the dusting of the attic. I will have

those trunks and boxes brought out from under the eaves, and you can examine their contents when you wish."

"Yes, do so," said Margaret; "it will be just the sort of work for a rainy afternoon. If it should prove tiresome we will take it homeopathic fashion, in small quantities."

The rain came, and the steady sweep of it on the old brown roof, as Margaret stood close under it in the wide, low-ceiled attic, wrought itself into a sweet minor melody to her consciousness. The mists were shifting in the valley; while high above, the rain-clouds clasped hands and closed up their ranks, marching in solid array as a bevy of school-children across the common. Margaret loved nature in all its changeful, varying moods. But rainy days gave her the most exquisite pleasure. She fell into harmony with nature's mood and let her imagination revel unrestrained. She lived more fully in the atmosphere of the ideal than at any other time, and the plainest duties that came to her invested themselves with a certain charm of vagueness and softness.

To-day, however, she knew that she was peculiarly alive and susceptible to impressions of all kinds; that she was unduly sensitive and restless for the kind of day. She found herself moving aimlessly about from place to place, only to come back to the same spot by the window, where she drummed with her fingers on the pane; and her eyes wandered down the old moss-gray roof, seeing the little rivulets of water as they ran in their hurrying course downward, uprooting a bit of lichen which floated

like a fairy boat, carrying to the great harbor, the eave-trough, its elfin freight.

Miss Price, in going through the house after she left Margaret on the veranda, slipped on the step of the kitchen door and nearly dislocated her ankle, which, after being bathed and bandaged, barely permitted her to reach her own room, where for a few days at least she must remain a prisoner.

There Margaret left her resting, and wandered up to the old attic. She felt the charm of the place anew to-day and wondered that she did not come oftener.

It was her fancy to people the ample rooms of this delightful old house as they might have been in the past, when tenanted by her dead and gone ancestors; to think of them full-freighted with the activities and incidents of everyday life, fruitful of joys, of griefs, of despairs. Her memories had to do with grown people for the most part, for there had never been many children at Steyne House, although two young brides had come into the old house and grown into gracious dames there. But to-day, as she looked about the wide, low room in its undisturbed relics of past generations, she saw evidences of the little hands and feet that had joyously climbed to this happy resort of childhood. But a heavy footstep, suddenly sounding on the stair, rudely dispelled her day-dream, and she turned to see the turbaned head and good-natured face of Hagar.

There was a little pucker in the old woman's forehead, and a look of anxiety on her usually placid face, which disappeared as she caught sight of her mistress.

"Heah yo is, missus! heah yo is at las'," she exclaimed in evident relief. "I's mighty glad t' fin' yo, ye bettah beliebe;" and coming close up to her she dropped her voice to a whisper: "Hit am jes' de providentest t'ing dat cud transpar, dat Missy Becky dun hurt he' fut."

"Why, Hagar, why do you say that?" her mistress asked in no small surprise.

"Yes 'tis, missus, I sesso; I's bin tryin' ha'd ter see yo by yo lone se'f, when nobuddy wur nigh. I hab sumpin' ter show ye, an' sumpin' dat I mus gib ter ye dis moon," declared the old black woman, with mystery in every line of her anxious face.

"Something to give to me, something to show me, and it must be done this moon?" reiterated Margaret wonderingly.

"Yes, I mus' do hit dis moon," the old woman urged with a strange insistence; "'n hit's puty nigh gone, 'n I hain't hed no chance befo'. I mus' show ye now; cain't wait anudder day. Cum down wid me dis minnit, right er long, honey;" and Hagar began descending the attic stair, with her wondering mistress close in her wake.

She did not halt on the second floor, but continued down the next stair into the hall below, proceeding along in silence to the library door, which she passed through and stopped to lock after them. All this was done with such an air of mystery that Margaret found herself becoming excited as well. The old woman went straight to a narrow closet at the left side of the wide fireplace. Opening the door she took from a hook a long cloak, belonging to Margaret, and laid it on a chair.

There was nothing in this cupboard or closet, Margaret knew, for she had looked into it often. It was only a narrow place, hardly two feet wide, just made to set in a pair of boots and hang up a coat, intended especially for the convenience of the master of the house. It was oak-lined. At the back, near the top, was a narrow shelf, beneath which a row of nails or hooks had been placed; nothing else. Serious doubts of Hagar's sanity began to shape themselves in the mind of her mistress.

After removing the wrap, Hagar reached up and pushed with her finger on one of the pegs or hooks, as Margaret supposed them to be, when to her amazement, with a little shove, the back of the closet swung easily inward, leaving a doorway sufficiently large for a man to pass easily through.

"Cum on, honey," said Hagar, passing through this opening. "Gib me yo' han', hit ain't berry light heah;" and the strong black hand of the old servant clasped assuringly the delicate white one of her young mistress, as they began to ascend the narrow stair. A piece of soft carpet completely deadened the sound of their footsteps.

Margaret was growing nervous. Where was she being taken by Hagar? What was she to look at? Was there some awful mystery here which she was to confront—one of those mysteries which are sometimes to be found in very old houses, and of which she had read? She trembled, and could scarcely control her voice.

"Where are you taking me, Hagar?" she asked faintly.

"I's jes' takin' yo up to show yo de secrit room, honey."

"The secret room!" cried her mistress, in amazement; and she stopped suddenly on the stair, her breath coming quickly, her face pale and wondering.

"Yes, de secrit room. Why not? Massa Henry used ter come up heah, and he say dat you'll like it, cos nobuddy dunno it's dar. I wuz t' tell yo about it," Hagar explained,

"There is no one up there?" The voice sounded faint and shaky as she asked the question, and she was leaning against the wall of the narrow staircase, afraid to proceed, despite Hagar's assuring manner.

"Naw, honey, dar hain't n'budy 'tall up dar; jes' nobudy;" and Hagar wondered why her mistress asked such queer questions.

It was a turning stair, but not a long one, and a few steps brought them to a door, when Hagar, raising herself on tiptoe, took down a key from a projecting ledge above, unlocked the door and pushed it open. Margaret with hesitating steps entered the secret room, the one mystery of the old house.

It was not a large room, nor was it a barren attic, for, though the brown rafters swept low at the sides, it was a comfortable, habitable, even homey room, with its cornered fireplace, its iron dogs and half-burnt logs in the old chimney. On the narrow mantelshelf stood a candlestick, with a pair of brass snuffers keeping guard alongside. A plain table occupied the center of the room, with a large easy-chair and a small straight-backed one near by. This was all. A square window facing south fur-

nished ample air and light. This window swung inward, and when Margaret opened it she discovered the location of the room. It was situated in one of the numerous gables of the great, rambling house. But that a room of its size could have been so cleverly contrived that she who had been an inmate of the house for months and explored its nooks and corners, had not suspected its existence, was more than she could understand; and she gazed about her with a feeling of the unreality of it all.

What a secure and comfortable hiding-place in time of war! What a safe refuge for wandering, footsore bands of soldiers when close pressed by the enemy! Patriot soldiers may have hidden here. The exigencies of war into which the nation was plunging when the old house was being built might have led the owner to the construction of this cleverly hidden room. Soldiers may have hidden there in the war so lately fought.

Hagar would surely know about it; she would ask her. But Hagar was coming toward her, and in her hands she carried a box—of polished wood with a brass hasp and knobby nails.

Margaret gazed fascinated and doubting. Was it the box from the library mantelshelf? was her first thought. It could not be, for she had seen that one there not an hour ago. No, there must be two boxes alike. They were alike, surely. She tingled to her finger-tips with the excitement of discovery.

Was she about to solve the mystery of that other box, or would this baffle her?

She left the window and went to meet Hagar. No, she was not to be disappointed; there was a key,

a small brass key made fast to the box by a slender chain. Margaret's hands shook as she received the box from Hagar, who said solemnly as she gave it to her:

"Massa Henry called me to 'im one day, jes' a week befo' he died, an' he sez to me, 'Heah, Hagah, I's gwine to trus' you wid dis heah box'—de Lawd bress him; 'I's gwine to trus' ye to gib it to de new missus when she cum heah;' an' he say kin' o' low, 'Hope she will come an' keep de ole place, an' dat you and Gabe will allus lib wif her; but ye mus' gib her dis box. Doan' gib it to ennybudy on'y her, an' nobudy mus' kno' dat ye hab it, nobudy 'tall. Will you min'?' he sez, arnest-lak. I cross my heart dat I tek care ob it an gib it to her. I sez, 'Nobudy on dis arf 'ill eber set dar two eyes on it 'ceptin her.' An dey hasn't, missy, 'deed dey hasn't," protested the old woman, solemnly.

"I believe you, Hagar; I believe you," said Margaret, earnestly. "But why did you not give it to me before?" she asked, wondering within herself that Hagar had remained silent about it so long, and about the message left by her cousin.

"Cause I dassn't; 'deed I dassn't; de planits wuzn't rite to bring ye good luck; I couldn't do it nohow befo' dis moon, an' I waited fer a sign, an' las' night I got de sign. Massa Henry he cum to de fut ob de bed an' he look at me an' he sez, 'Gib her de box!' I see 'im stanin' dar plain. Den I kno's de right time hab cum, an' I's watched fer ye all de bressed day. I kno'd it wur shuah ter cum, an' when Missy Price twiss'd her jint an' had ter go ter bed, I kno'd what 'twas fer, 'twas so I cud

gib ye de box an' show ye dis room, dis' as my marse tole me."

"You don't believe that, do you, Hagar? You don't believe that such things happen just to open the way for us to do the things we wish, do you?" asked her mistress.

"Not allus; not mean t'ings, missus, ner triflin' t'ings, but when ye hes a call an' hears it plain, de way allus cums. What made Missy Becca step crook'd on dat doahstep? Now, tell me dat! She neber dun it befo'."

The argument was unanswerable, and the mistress said kindly:

"You have been a good and faithful woman, Hagar, faithful to your old master, and faithful to me. I thank you for it; and be sure I would trust you just as implicitly as your master trusted you did I stand in need of such service. We will go down now to the library; I do not wish to stay up here longer."

How humanly strange, and how strangely human, how altogether imcomprehensible we are! thought Margaret, when she knew that she wanted to fly down to the library and open that box on the shelf; that she cared less to know the contents of the box she carried in her hands than she did for the pleasure and satisfaction she would take in opening the one that had stood before her so long, impenetrable and baffling.

She picked her way carefully down the stair after Hagar and through the closet, which the old woman closed after them, carefully replacing the wrap on the hook.

Margaret went on with quick steps up to Miss Price's room, but Miss Price was sleeping and must not be disturbed. She must wait. Disappointed, she turned away. Waiting in her present state of mind was an impossibility. She would return to the library and open that box alone. She was feverishly excited, yet strangely happy. She felt impelled by some unseen force, and seemed to have locked hands with some insistent spirit which drew her where it would. She had never felt so before. With this feeling upon her, she ran quickly down the stair into the wide hall.

A lovely flush was on her animated face as she held her box with both hands clasped tightly against her breast. The wide doors of the hall stood open. Outside on the veranda a man was removing his waterproof coat, and Gabriel was leading a horse round to the stable.

XII.

TWO PEOPLE AND A RAINY DAY.

"When in thy eager eyes I look, to find
A comrade to my thought, thy ready brain
Delves down and makes its inmost meaning plain,
Mind answers unto mind."

THE man stepped over the threshold, and saw Margaret Steyne as she left the gloom of the wide stairway. It was Mr. Thorne. He paused an instant, and then came forward in that courteous manner which was a part of the strong personality of the man.

"Have I surprised a fair pirate escaping with her booty?" he asked smiling. "That strong box plainly suggests hidden treasure or mystery of some kind."

When Margaret beheld him in the doorway a startled, mystified look flashed into her eyes, a look which might have passed for momentary surprise with one less observant than Thorne, so quickly did she recover herself. But it had been there; and brief as it was the man had seen it, but too late to check his words. The next instant Margaret went forward and gave him her hand in graceful welcome.

"You certainly did surprise me, Mr. Thorne, by appearing so unexpectedly, and I may look some-

thing like a robber or freebooter, but I can confess only to pirating what belongs to me, if that can be called piracy," and she laughed a little nervously.

There was more warmth in their greeting than there had been before. A rainy day is a bar to formality ; it brings with it an influence which permeates the atmosphere and creates a spirit of camaraderie in the most ungenial and unsympathetic of mankind. With this influence upon them they had met and spoken, and stood talking in the gray light of the old hall.

"I fear you have had an unpleasant ride, Mr. Thorne," said Margaret, glancing beyond her companion through the open door where the rain fell steadily.

"It is nothing," he replied indifferently, as he hung his hat on the polished antlers and loosed his spur.

Margaret stood with her treasure box clasped against her breast. But a little thoughtful frown sat between her straight brows, and the color came and went on the creamy cheek with every flickering breath. The lovely eyes held a sparkle in their depths, as she gazed out upon the leaden space framed by the doorway. How pretty she looked in her perplexity ! A man could not be mortal and not want to shield her, and count the service a sweet one. Margaret was different to-day : some unusual emotion was swaying her. Thorne watched her face, and knew that some feeling lay near the surface which she was trying to subdue. She appeared unconscious of his presence, yet he felt that there was something trembling on her

tongue for utterance ; something she wished to tell him that she was weighing and pondering over.

Would she speak and strengthen the slender thread which ran through their lives ? He remembered her emotion at seeing him ; was she going to explain it ? His dark eyes never left her face. It was worth waiting for, and he waited silently, but with every sense alert ; eye, mind, and soul attuned to the subtlest sympathy.

Slowly her eyes came back to his face, and he knew that he had not waited in vain ; that she was going to trust him, going to speak to him about something that touched her own life. He sighed, and then he knew that he desired to have this link or bond strengthened between them, desired it with a feverish intentness that he had not suspected.

She spoke frankly and without hesitation, and he was glad of it. He wanted her confidence to come to him uncompelled and unreservedly, if it might.

"I am going to tell you," she said, "that you found me on the point of satisfying a curiosity to which I have been a prey ever since I came here. You see, I am honest. I want to unravel a mystery. Will you help me ?"

Would he help her ? Did she know that this was the one request he had hoped to hear ?—that it was the sweetest that could fall from her lips ? For was it not the earnest of a dawning trust in him ?

"I will help you most gladly in any way, at any time ; you have only to ask if I do not see," he said.

The words and tone were conventional, but the

promise was dual. In his heart he had silently recorded a vow that he would keep to the end of life.

"Come into the library," she said. "That box," indicating by a gesture where it stood on the shelf over the old fireplace, "has been a tantalizing mystery to me for so long. I have never been able to open it; no key could be found to unlock it. The exterior, as you say, is suggestive of something out of the usual; it has tantalized me, seeming at times to mock me with its strength and security. To-day, only just now, Hagar gave me this box, which she says was left by her old master in her possession for me. Now, the boxes are exactly alike; do you not see?"

"They certainly look alike," he answered.

"Surely they are; and there is a key attached to this one."

He stepped quietly to the old fireplace, reached down the box, and placed it on the table beside the other: "They are counterparts, alike in every particular, unless the locks should differ," he said.

"Oh, I hope not; that would be quite too disappointing," exclaimed Margaret.

"We shall soon know," he replied; and the two heads bent silently over the work with the same interest and object, to fit the key into the lock of the other box.

The chain which held the key was short, making it awkward work; and Margaret's hand inadvertently touched Thorne's. She flushed a little and drew back in the shortest possible way, saying:

"You will do better alone."

"Not unless I may snap the chain," he replied.

"Snap it," she said.

His hand closed over it, the chain parted, and the key lay in his hand.

Margaret thanked him, and taking the key, quickly inserted it in the lock of the sphinx like box, and turned back the lid. The box was empty. She smiled down at its emptiness a little triumphantly, Thorne thought.

"Are you not disappointed?" he asked, a little puzzled by her indifference to the barrenness of results when she had been so eager about it.

"No," she said; "I hardly expected to find anything; I wanted to open that box."

Had she looked toward her companion she must have discovered his amusement at what he considered her purely feminine logic. But Margaret was looking at the small key. Turning it over in her hand she finally reached it to Thorne.

"What a peculiar key! It bears a foreign stamp and is quite unlike anything one sees. It must be very old. Yet I seem to have seen a key like it before, but I cannot think where."

"From small things spring great results," quoted Thorne, smiling.

"The results in this case are satisfactory." said Margaret, smiling. "But that is one of Rebecca's pet sayings."

At the mention of Miss Price's name, Thorne remembered that he had not inquired for her, and he made haste to repair his seeming indifference by asking for her.

"How thoughtless of me!" said Margaret. She

then told him of the accident to Miss Price's ankle that was keeping her to her room. "She is resting now, and I am sure will be sorry to have missed your visit, for she has a sincere liking for you."

"Strange, isn't it?" he said.

"Yes, it is," declared Margaret, determined not to humor his audacity. "It *is* strange, because Rebecca is a very conservative person and not given to sudden friendships."

"I am proud of the distinction. It pleases me to be liked by some people. People of strong individuality attract me, and Miss Price has that. She is altogether one of the most certain people I have ever known. Her words go straight to the mark, like a bullet from a rifle."

"Yes," replied Margaret; "I have observed it, and it is a refreshing bit of honesty. You always know just what she means."

"I always distrust conversational jugglers myself," said Thorne. "Like people who are fond of snakes, they will bear watching."

"Do you think that is always true?—of the people who like snakes, I mean?"

"I have found it so, in the little experience I have had," he replied. "But I regret that I am not to see our friend to-day. Will you express to her my sympathy?"

"With pleasure. You are not remaining long in the neighborhood, then?"

"No; my coming was unexpected; it was the result of a telegram I received last night, calling me North on business. I rode my own horse down, the bay colt I recently purchased. He brought me

the thirty miles without turning a hair," he added, with all a horseman's pride in his favorite.

"And then, after all, you were too late for your train?"

"No, I was in good time, but there had been an accident down the road which threw out the morning train. So I made no time after all."

"And you rode all night, and it was so dark?" The sympathy in her voice was commensurate with the hardship endured in an all-night ride, as seen from a woman's point of view. The man understood this, and his eyes came back to her face.

"I'm all right," he said. "I had several hours' rest this morning, and came up here to tell you of my going."

"You are not going for good?" she said interrogatively.

"No, I am not going away for good," he said slowly. He was thinking how little his going out of this woman's life would mean to her. "I shall not be absent long; two weeks may see me back. But part of my errand to-day is to learn if you wish to arrange for the development of your coal, for if you do, it is one of the matters I wish to bring before our company."

"Yes," she said, "I have decided to follow your advice in the matter, and I leave it in your hands to arrange about it. If anything can be done to furnish work for the unemployed, it should be done now, when it is so sorely needed."

"Then when I return I will bring you a definite offer, and will come to see you as soon as I can. I brought with me a small plat of that part of your

land. I had our engineer prepare it, thinking it would be of use to you."

He took a paper from the breast-pocket of his coat and spread it out before her on the table. "It shows the line of survey just run, the coal-bed, and the boundary lines. By looking over it you will soon became familiar with the situation." And he explained to her the markings, making some additional ones with a pencil that she might more readily comprehend.

"I am grateful for your kindness. This map is just what I need for an intelligent understanding of the matter," said Margaret.

"The trouble was slight; you are more than welcome," he returned.

"But I am already indebted to you, Mr. Thorne, for much kindness and advice. The kindness, I assure you, I appreciate, and hope to repay some day; but the advice," she said smiling, "I fear I am hopelessly in debt for; but I shall show my estimation of its worth by following it."

"Permit me to be your friend," he said, "and never speak of obligation again. And now"—he went on quietly, not waiting for a reply—"now that I have completed my errand I will not trespass further on your time. Your other treasure-box is unexplored;" and he smiled again as he looked down at the empty box.

"How much time have you?" asked Margaret, looking up at the dark face above her.

He had risen and taken up his gloves from the table; he took out his watch.

"Just three hours," he answered grimly.

"Then stay and spend them here, if you would like—if it would be more pleasant for you. As an inducement you may share with me the pleasure of exploring my other treasure-box." And the friendly brown eyes sought his with that look of expectant comradeship which proves so irresistible.

But what strange influence was at work with these two lives to-day? Did some adverse invisible power control the chain of circumstances which was winding its length about them?

"We may find something to interest us," she continued; "and then when Rebecca wakes we will go up to her and you will not have made your visit in vain; you will both be happy."

"I will answer for my happiness whether I see Miss Price or not," murmured Thorne under his breath, while a wave of feeling swept over his face which, had Margaret Steyne seen, must have startled her, but he turned away his head.

When he faced her again and spoke she neither heard nor saw any sign of the momentary conflict of heart and mind.

"I thank you. There are high and low degrees in measuring life," he said smiling. "Have you ever tried spending a half-day at the tavern down there?"

"I never have," she replied.

"Then you cannot know how very kind you have been. It gives me more happiness than I can describe to accept your invitation."

He sat down. It was a reckless impulse of the heart which he followed, but he would take the next few hours unquestioningly. They had come to

him without will or thought of his, and why should he deny himself this brief companionship with this lovely, pure-hearted woman? Why deny himself the intellectual sympathy which his soul craved as the thirsty man craves drink in the desert? There was no wrong, he said; there could be none. He knew his strength, and no one would suffer but himself, and—well, he could afford that. A little pain more or less could make no difference in his life.

Was it strange that he should think of Paul Grey at this moment? He did not know why, but he did think of him and began speaking of him to Margaret, telling her how much the professor was enjoying his first experience of camp life; that he was gaining flesh and strength and looking much better already; that he had more than once expressed his satisfaction that he had not returned to Richmond or gone back North as he had thought of doing. "And," he continued, "that brings to mind a question I wanted to ask you, Miss Steyne. Have you heard from your lawyer about the check you sent to him?"

"Yes, I had a letter from him this morning which contained a certificate of deposit from the bank."

"Why do you suppose he was so long about replying to your letter?" asked Thorne.

"Oh, I am to blame for that," she confessed naively. "There was no delay on his part. I did not write immediately."

He was beginning to tell her that she had done wrong, when he was interrupted by an exclamation from her.

"Mr. Thorne," she said, "I know now where I saw that key, the key like this one, and the one that belongs to this box."

She had rested her elbows on the table and was clasping and unclasping her hands in the old child-like fashion.

"Lawyer Harris had it with his keys. It was the day we came up here first. He had read the will to me, and we were going to dinner, and he put all the papers that were lying on the table in the secretary and took his keys from his pocket to lock it. That key was among them."

"You are sure you did not mistake?" asked Thorne.

"I am sure I did not. I noticed them particularly; he held them in his hand as he talked. He has the key to this box. Now, why did he not give it to me when he gave me the other keys? Isn't it strange?" She leaned across the table toward him in her excitement.

"Yes, it certainly is strange, something not easy to account for;" and he looked thoughtful. "Do you know Lawyer Harris well?" he asked after a pause.

"Not well; I have seen so little of him," she said.

"Did you know nothing of him in your cousin's lifetime?" he asked in surprise.

"Nothing whatever; I never saw him. I never saw my cousin; which must seem odd to you, but you knew, did you not, that he lived the life of a recluse here, never leaving if he could help, nor receiving anyone if he could avoid doing so."

"Yes, I had heard something of it, but not what caused him to choose such a life."

"His living as he did seems to have been as much a mystery to his friends as it was to strangers. I do not know his reasons, and will not judge him," said Margaret.

"You are kind in that," he said; "for we can rarely be just in our judgment of others' motives."

"Mr. Harris tells me that he was my cousin's life-long friend, and Cousin Henry must have trusted him, it seems. I know that he came often—not often, but several times a year to visit him, and that he had charge of all Cousin Henry's business affairs. I do not want to be unjust to Mr. Harris, yet I do feel a little uncomfortable over it, and wish that he was not such a stranger to me. I wish he was not, indeed. His letter of to-day proves him to be the possessor of a large fund of curiosity. I gave it to Rebecca to read and pass judgment upon."

"What did she say of it?" Thorne was interested.

"Her impressions were not very favorable."

"She is a good judge of character," he asserted; "one of the best I know. I should like to hear her verdict."

"She says that Lawyer Harris is fond of power and dominion; that what once comes under his power or control he will never relinquish willingly; and I am afraid I think so too," Margaret added.

Her head rested on her hand, and the little frown showed between the dark brows. She was thinking; and a charming study she made to the man sitting opposite, who watched the sweet, expressive face in silence.

Mechanically, it seemed, she reached out her hand and drew the brass-bound box to her, and slowly raised the lid. It looked to be full of papers. A package neatly tied with cord lay on top. She removed it, bringing to light a small morocco case, the only thing in which was a small ring, evidently a lady's. The band of gold was handsomely carved, but had been worn until its beautiful finish was lost and the fine gold fretted in places; but it still held much of its old beauty. The center stone was of a pale dull-green color; the gem was unknown to both Margaret and Mr. Thorne. Altogether it was an attractive-looking ring, but extremely odd, and interesting because of its oddness and its possible history. The diamonds set around the large stone were fine though small. There was but one other piece of jewelry in the box, a heart-shaped locket of more modern design, the fine workmanship of which was displayed in the arrangement of pearls and diamonds set in the case. It held the picture of a young girl, a lovely brunette face, full of a subdued bohemian sweetness and charm. It was a face that appealed strangely to your sympathies, without your being able to tell why.

"A Southern type in coloring and contour," Thorne said.

They looked at the sweet face a moment, and Margaret took from the bottom of the box another paper, carefully folded, on the outside of which was written her own name. A new interest sprang into her face. This was something intended for her. Could it be a message from her cousin? Her fingers trembled as she opened it. The ink was not

faded; what it contained could not have been written a great while.

"You will pardon me," she said, looking up at her companion.

"I should not, if you do not read it at once," he said.

There was no date, but across the top was written: "To my kinswoman, Margaret Steyne." And this was what she read:

"As this life draws to a close, our vision becomes clearer, our duties stand out with wonderful distinctness, and duties left undone the clearest of all.

"The thought of you who are to come after me as my next in kinship is in my last hours my most accusing thought. I feel strongly that I have been careless, and carelessness is as damning to a man as the greater vices. I meant through all my life to be kind and merciful. I look back over the long years as I near the end of my journey, and I know that I have been weak and selfish. I should have sent for you and learned to know you. I should have helped you; whereas I have not, and now it is too late. I do not know where to write to you. Caleb knows, but he has not told me, and I am not sure that he would tell me were I to ask him. I will leave what I write with my old black servant Hagar, for I know that she will be faithful and deliver it into your hands, as I shall direct her to do.

"I very earnestly want to do now what I can to help you; I grieve that I cannot do more. I have made out a record of all transactions pertaining to my business, which if you will study carefully you

can understand ; also a copy of my will, and certain statements which you will find in the box with this letter. I do this because I do not want you to be dependent on Caleb, my lawyer, as I have been ; for with my clearer vision I see him the hard, masterful man he is, dominant and selfish. It will be best for you not to let him have more to do with your life than you can help. Do not let him rule you as he will wish to rule you. But do not make an enemy of him if you can avoid it, for he would prove a bitter enemy for man or woman. If you know of some good man whom you can trust, I would say put everything into his hands.

"It is my great desire that you may be prosperous and happy. I hope you will come here, and be spared to live many years in this old home where so many of your ancestors have lived, and that you will keep my old servants with you, for they will be faithful when others fail you ; and you will come to know that faithfulness is a rare virtue, and one to be highly prized.

"Be brave ; all my life I have weakly borne a burden, when I should have shaken it off and been free. I have been weak. Men and women should have strength ; they need it. Remember, it is a sin to be weak.

"Heaven bless you,

"Your kinsman,

"HENRY STEYNE."

Margaret Steyne passed the letter over to Thorne. "Read it," she said.

She was pale. The message from her cousin had

moved her almost to tears. It had come to her unfortunately to-day, when she had been on a nervous strain for several hours. Of all the feelings which her cousin's letter called forth, compassion and sympathy dominated; sympathy for her cousin's sorrow, compassion for his weakness.

Thorne realized this. He was one of those persons who intuitively understand women. A man, with all a man's physical strength and courage, yet possessing the instinctive, sympathetic perceptions of a woman, is a man rarely planned. Such a man was Tom Thorne.

"This is a remarkable letter of your cousin's, Miss Steyne," he said; "and while it reveals some of the shadows of his life, it must bring great comfort to you, for you will not feel so much a stranger to him now, when you have it from himself that he thought kindly of you and wanted you to live here and be happy in his old home—happier than he had been. I am glad for you," he said warmly.

"Yes, I am glad of it too," exclaimed Margaret earnestly. "It does make a difference. I feel now that I really had a cousin. He has a personality to me that he did not have before. I am not compelled to know him any longer through Lawyer Harris, and you cannot understand what a relief it is to me."

"You have found the comfort of it," he said gently, "but you must not ignore the purpose for which the letter was written, which was to warn you against Lawyer Harris. Your and Miss Price's judgment of the man is confirmed by what your cousin says, and he must have known him well;

'masterful and selfish,' he called him. I wonder if that is all?"

"I fear not," Margaret replied. "I have not told anyone, not even Rebecca, that he tried to dissuade me from coming here to make this place my home, even saying that my cousin expressed himself against it, and had thought I would better sell it."

"Did he say that?" asked Thorne.

"Yes, and I worried about it. I wanted to believe that my cousin wished me to live here, that he had left a welcome for me, just as he did. But you do not know that I never had a home of my own before, and so you cannot know how I felt about it. I just had to come." The unshed tears hung on the dark lashes, tears of homesickness and happiness.

"And it was a brutal falsehood," said Thorne, choking down the words to which he dared not give utterance.

"What do you think could have been his motive?" she asked.

"That I cannot say; but he had one, be sure of that, and we will try to discover it in time. Will you tell me all he said to you in that connection,—that is,—if you don't mind?"

"Surely I do not mind;" and she gave him a history of her business interviews with the lawyer from first to last, to which he listened attentively and in which he saw more than she guessed.

"I fear," he said at the close, "that your accomplished lawyer is not only masterful and selfish, but a dishonorable scoundrel as well."

To Thorne it was plain that the lawyer had it in

his mind to get possession of the plantation ; that he and no other was the purchaser who was ready to buy when she could be induced to sell ; and that he would now be the owner of the old family place had it not been for her resolution and firmness, and her love of home.

"Do you think he could have been the cause of my cousin's mysterious retirement from the world ?" she questioned.

"I should hardly venture an opinion about that. What your cousin has said, while it suggests such a thought, is very indefinite."

"I wish I knew all about it. It is so trying to know a little bit of one's life, just a fragment, when you want to know all," said Margaret.

"It is trying ; yet we are always meeting with things that try us in that way. Our lives seem one tangled skein. The threads of other lives become knotted and crossed with ours, and we cannot get free from them and fling aside their influence, though it be an almost invisible thread that connects them. The influence of your cousin's life is upon yours, and must ever be. As to this lawyer having had some power over Henry Steyne—for he speaks of his weakness in submitting to a burden—we can have not the least doubt. It may have been some difficulty, slight and unimportant, which he brooded over and magnified, possibly some event in his early life that he felt had compromised him in the eyes of the world, of which this man Harris took advantage. Or it may have been financial obligation in some form."

"It could not have been that," insisted Margaret ;

"there was no reason why he should be under any money obligation to Harris."

"It is hardly probable, I admit; but if it were so those papers in your box will doubtless make it plain."

"Yes, and we must examine them," she said. "I am so glad you are here, for you will help me to understand about them, and tell me what to do, I am sure."

Margaret's hand moved toward the box of papers, and then drew back.

"No," she said, "we will not look at them just yet. We will wait until we go up to Rebecca's room that she may hear and know, for she is my elder sister in all things. I have no one else to talk to, you know. How fortunate for me that you should have happened to come to-day, just this day! And how strange!" She murmured the last words under her breath, and with a puzzled expression of countenance. But low as the words were breathed, they did not escape his ear.

He fell to wondering what lay behind the words, and the silence was broken only after some time, by Miss Steyne asking him a question which brought his wandering wits to a sudden focus, it was so unexpected and unusual.

"Mr. Thorne, do you believe in fate or in psychological phenomena?"

"Do I believe in fate or psychological phenomena?" He repeated the question slowly, while groping for his mental balance, out of which he had for the moment been startled, not more by surprise than by the serious air with which it had been asked.

"Yes, that strange force which has been called the key of the soul, but which is such an embracing ology that the scientific definition is not always closely adhered to. The unlettered call such things providences or warnings, the things that Hagar says she feels in her bones are going to happen before they do; intangible impressions of coming events by which you are affected, and of which you could know nothing beforehand, save in some occult way, and which really do happen, and——"

She wound up with a pretty little gesture of the small hands, expressive of the breadth and scope of the science, and the indefiniteness of the definition.

"Does a belief in fate, I wonder, ever come to us through knowledge of incidents in the lives of others, or must the belief be knocked into us by our own personal experiences?" said Thorne meditatively.

"Anything that makes us feel," said Margaret, "we think about, and so come to some conclusion about soonest, I should say."

"Yes," said Thorne, "and with all we are likely to have our preconceived ideas about such a belief overturned almost any day, for we are constantly meeting in our own lives with incidents that stagger us. And this new science of psychology—or rather revived old science—I have not thought enough about to come to any settled belief. I have a friend who, while an officer in the army and stationed at Calcutta, became interested in the science. He has talked to me about it, and I am interested. Will you tell me what made you think of it at this time?"

"Nothing very important. It was only a series of

impressions and happenings," she said after a moment's hesitation ; " but they seemed so curiously woven together that I have been forced to think of them as bearing some relation to each other. I awoke this morning strangely impressed that something was going to happen to-day—something unusual. It was not the effect of a dream, for I had not dreamed, and was not depressed. I had the feeling that something would occur which would change, or rather influence my life strongly. It is hard to describe anything so elusive, and make it intelligible, but there was some difficulty to be met and overcome, and some one who would advise me and help me to meet it. I had no idea who this person was to be, but it was not anyone of my household, not Miss Price. I received a letter this morning, but that did not seem either to remove or to fulfill the impression—or presentiment ; it remained with me all the morning. Some hours later Hagar came to me with a mysterious manner enveloping her like a mantle, telling me that her master had come and stood at the foot of her bed last night and had commanded her to give me this box, here before us ; and she gave it to me in accordance with the instructions which she believes came as a direct command from him ; gave it to me in a lonely, unused room in the house, and with words and manner so impressive that I confess I began to grow horribly nervous, almost afraid. I hastened to my only friend, Rebecca, for comfort and sympathy, but she was suffering and asleep. I could not wake her ; I was thrown back upon myself. I clasped the mysterious box, my legacy, my secret, whatever it

might be, and ran downstairs, and on the threshold I met you. Do you wonder that I was startled when I saw you?—that I was a little bewildered at first, and am so still?"

While Margaret talked, Thorne sat like a statue, his dark eyes glowing with living fire.

"No," he said at last, with a throbbing intensity of feeling underneath his quiet manner, "I do not wonder. It was a strange experience throughout." He said no more, but quietly studied every change in the thoughtful face of his companion, across the mysterious-looking box which stood open on the table between them.

"You said a few moments ago," Margaret resumed, "that our lives were a tangled web, crossed by the threads of other lives; that, though but a thread held and bound us together, we could not loose it, nor shake off the influence of that other life. Now, let us pursue this theory as far as we can go, and see where it will lead us, though it prove an ignis fatuus."

"Willingly," he said. "Though it prove utterly fanciful it is interesting." He was having a rare treat when she talked in this mood, and he knew it. He knew too, that in all probability they would never again talk together as they were talking that day.

"You have said that my cousin's influence is on my life. We can understand that, and we can trace the lines of connection between the lives of Harris, Henry Steyne, and myself. Now, your life has been in no way connected with mine—is not now; we cannot have influenced each other's lives in any

way. There is no thread here, however slight, is there?"

There was a slight droop of the lashes over the dark eyes bent upon her from across the table, but he did not speak, and she went on.

"Have you ever known Henry Steyne or Lawyer Harris? Has there been friendship or hatred between you, or have your life lines crossed in any way?"

She was speaking slowly and hesitatingly, as though putting her hands before her when walking in the dark: "You do not understand."

"Yes, I understand perfectly," he replied. "If I seemed to hesitate, it was because I was going back in thought over my past life carefully, and I am quite certain that I never saw this man Harris, never heard of him before. Henry Steyne I saw once in New Orleans. It was when he first went there. He was pointed out to me casually by a friend on the street. I did not meet him; I was young, still a student at college, and soon after went abroad to study, and remained away from home almost three years. There would seem to be no connection, no converging of interests, no influence of one life upon the other, between either of those men and myself, if that is what you mean?" he said.

"Yes, I suppose it is," Margaret answered. "I was groping about for some ground on which to anchor your theories; searching for a thread, if but a spider's, with which to stay them."

"And you cannot find them. You will now have done with all such unsubstantial theories; the threads do not exist," he said laughingly.

She smiled, shaking her head negatively.

"I cannot find them," she said; "I almost wish I could. I have been puzzled, mystified, am puzzled still. Do you wonder that I am?"

"No, I do not wonder. Older persons than you have been puzzled and mystified, and with less reason," he said; and a silence fell between them.

The rain came down with a soft but steady patter on roof and leaf. The tall clock in the hall ticked off the minutes solemnly or joyfully as the soul listened, but inexorably. The silence was full of speaking memories to the fair young mistress of the old house.

What did the hour say to the man? He was lounging back in the depths of the large high-backed chair, his well-knit figure showing to the best advantage in his tight coat and riding boots. He looked young, younger than she had ever seen him. The weary, repressed look, suggestive of banked fires, had died out of his face; and his eyes, softly smiling, rested on the old fireplace where, half buried in a bed of soft gray ashes, lay a burnt and blackened log of rough-barked wood. The lion-headed andirons at either end stood grimly defiant. This was all. What visions did he see there that set the stamp of what seemed absolute happiness on his strong countenance? There was a soft, absorbed look on his face, and he appeared oblivious of the presence of anyone in the room, of time, or place. But when Margaret Steyne idly took the old ring from its case and would have slipped it on her finger, he saw and spoke:

"I would not put it on," he said. "I have a feel-

ing against your doing it." She looked up at him inquiringly. "Pardon me speaking so, but I would not wear a ring like that until I knew its history or something of the associations which surrounded it. I hope that you will learn about it some time, and that it has been worn by a happy person."

"I thank you for speaking. I was putting it on almost without knowing that I was doing so. It is an odd-looking ring," she said, turning it about in her hand. "It is marked inside, but so faintly that I cannot make it out. Who knows? It may be a talisman, or possibly it possesses occult powers," she said lightly. "There! go back to the quiet nook where you have lain hidden so long. We have had enough of mystery for one day;" and cannily handling the ring she dropped it back into its case. Then she closed the case and placed it in the bottom of the box, and with one more look at the sweet face in the locket put them together, and laid the papers on top.

The old sentinel of time in the hall struck the hour that had passed so swiftly.

"I will go to see if Rebecca is awake," Margaret said, rising.

When she had gone, Thorne left his seat in front of the fireplace and began walking slowly back and forth across the floor in an absorbed manner. He was dreaming, had been dreaming, he told himself. He must pull himself together; but he made no effort of will to shake off the spell which was upon him.

"It is a sin to be weak, remember." He repeated the words of Henry Steyne's letter slowly and audibly, but they had no effect upon him. "It is a sin

to be weak." They came as words spoken by some far-off voice ; they were vague and meaningless to him. They were not meant for him, not to-day. These few short hours were his. He took out his watch and laid it in the palm of his hand and stood looking down at it. They were passing swiftly. Well, let them go ; they were giving him an eternity of happiness. He asked no more.

There was a sound at the window, a soft rushing sound as of a branch brushed against the glass. He went over to it. A young swallow, storm-beaten and exhausted, lay on the stone sill in the rain. He opened the window and took it in. It did not flutter nor shrink from his hand. It had reached the point where it could resist no more, no more cry out, as the human soul when beaten and bruised sore by the waves of adversity comes to bear in silence, and make no moan.

Its breath came in little pants of weariness, as it lay. While he stood looking at it, wondering what had brought it there, Margaret entered the room and joined him at the window.

"Where did it come from?" she asked. "Oh, I see ; it was out in the rain."

"Yes, it came to the window almost as you left the room."

"Poor, tired little wanderer!" she said compassionately. "Shall I take it out to Hagar?"

"No, it will gain strength faster as it is ; the electricity from my body will revive it." He had taken it up and laid it in the palm of his hand, and was looking at it and speaking in a dreamy, absorbed way.

"It was weak; it should not have braved the storm, but it did, and fell by the way, and the pitiless rain was beating out its life."

"I can but wonder why it left the safe shelter of its home, to wander out in the storm," said Margaret.

"Some imagined necessity, I fancy," Thorne answered. "Or some irresistible impulse governed it, as we are governed and led for the moment, even the strongest of us, to do that which we know may be our peril."

"It has had a bitter lesson," she said.

"It has had its opportunity, but it may not learn its lesson. We often miss it. But it was weak and must suffer for it. It is nature's law for man and brute."

He said it without any bitterness, and placing the bird gently down on the window-sill again, they left it there and went upstairs to Miss Price.

Nothing brings a man back from the plane of ideality and dream-life to the sternly real, and steadies his pulses like the details of business. When Thompson Thorne sat down at the table in Miss Price's room he was the self-contained business man to the tips of his fingers, with every faculty alert as he went carefully over the papers contained in the brass-bound box, pointing out and explaining to the ladies those which were important.

A business life is a school in which a man learns concentration and self-control, and whatever else Thorne had not learned, he had learned to control himself. And a business life was not the only school in which he had been disciplined, in which he was

yet in the bitterness of fate conning his lesson day by day, hour by hour.

When they had gone downstairs they stood by the table in the library ; Margaret locked the empty box, and asked him to place it back on the mantel. She liked to see it there, she said, and it would never again deceive or mock her, for she knew it was empty.

"Like some men's lives," he had said quietly, as he took her hand at parting.

To the occupants of Steyne House life would go on as before. What of the man who rode away ? Would life go on for him as it had in the past ?

He thought it all out as he rode down through the rain. Three hours of such happiness had never before come into his life and might never come again. He had yielded his heart to the passion of love, had turned his face from the bitter pain and disappointment of life, and for that brief eternity had looked into the dear eyes, listened to the sweet voice of the woman he knew that he loved with every impulse of his being ; a love that thrilled and swayed him as no other passion had ever done.

And she did not dream that he loved her, he who had no right to love her, for whom it was a sin. He had been weak. "It is a sin to be weak, remember," he murmured. Then, fiercely exultant, he hugged his joy to his heart. He had sinned, and he would remember, aye, to the hour of his death. No sorrow, no pain or suffering could take from him the memory of those hours. Come what might, that was his. He would not repent, he could not. He loved this sweet, pure-hearted woman through no will of his

own ; it had come upon him in the first hours of their meeting ; come as a hurricane sweeps over the wide plain, without warning or premonition, and with such strength that, strong man though he was, he had been swept along unresistingly. He could not reason against it ; he seemed without volition in the matter. A new power had come into his life. He was face to face with a force he had never felt before, a force that must be controlled.

The words at last had pierced the ecstasy of wild joy which had filled him. Back rolled the waters of bitterness and remorse to beat upon his heart.

"Dear God !" he moaned, and his face blanched.

That night as the train sped northward through the darkness, Thorne sat through the long, bitter hours immovable, in the shadow and loneliness of the forward end of the car. His hat was drawn low over his eyes. It was a bad night, and there were but few passengers in the car. He might have chosen a more comfortable seat had he wished, but he sat where he did because it was farthest away from the other passengers. Human companionship was the one thing he felt he could not endure. The rebellious, beating heart throbbed in fierce sympathy with the rush and roar of the train, the darkness and storm without. It fitted the wild misery in his heart. The lamps blinked dimly as though undecided whether to die out or to continue to shine on in their uncertain way. The colored porter of the Pullman car had recognized him when he came aboard, and when after some time had passed he did not come into his car, as was his custom, came and spoke to him, but was sent away.

"I want no other comfort than I have," he said, shortly.

"You are not ill, are you, sir?" the man asked with kindly insistence, as he had a glimpse of Thorne's face. The sympathy in the man's voice touched him, and awakening to a sense of what he was doing, he looked up.

"No, I am all right," he replied in his usual kindly tones. It was just the touch of humanity that he needed; it was a man's sympathy, and it did him good, no matter how lowly the heart offering it, for he was having it out with himself, as he said.

He realized now where he stood. He felt the sin of his mad love, his worse than mad yielding to it; and when he faced about on himself he was not merciful to his weakness, and he had been cursedly, madly weak. It was too late, he told himself piteously, to make his life over or order it different from what it was. He had made shipwreck of happiness when he married, but he would not make shipwreck of his honor.

Margaret Steyne did not dream of his love for her, could not, for in her presence his eye and voice had been sternly controlled. She had only that day trusted him, given him her sweet confidence, and did she know what she held in return? Ah! she never should know. She had trusted him.

Thorne was not vain. He knew that she had trusted him and accepted his aid because circumstances had placed him near her at the time when she needed help. It might have been another, if not he; but it was he, and she should not suffer through his weakness, heaven helping him, he said rever-

ently. And there he stayed himself. By some subtlety of reasoning he had brought himself into the relation of her protector against himself, and they were both safe. He would hold her sacred and watch over her from a distance. Her welfare should be dearer, far, than his own peace of mind. He would merit her confidence; would be worthy of her respect, and his own. How hard it would be for him to keep to the line he had marked out to follow, only God and himself knew, and no one else should know. He said it with all the strength born of a solemn resolve. In this conflict mind should rule. Margaret Steyne might marry. Well, let her; his care should not cease. She might need a friend some time. He would be ready. He remembered the vow he had made only that day. Such was the safety-line Thorne grappled fast; such the obligation he assumed. Did ever knight set to himself a harder task? Would he ever regret it? He said that he would not.

XIII.

LAWYER HARRIS CONTEMPLATES A CHANGE.

"I fling my past behind me, like a robe
Worn threadbare in the seams and out of date;
I have done with it."

On one of the main streets of the city of Richmond, close to the principal business centre,—only escaping it by being around the corner,—stands a semi-prosperous-looking building. The low-ceiled rooms, the small window-panes, and the numerous windows marked the fashion of architecture which flourished a half-century ago. The brick had grown dark with time; the broad stone window-sills, too, had taken on the hue of age, and the wide stone steps were worn hollow in the middle by the ceaseless tread of busy-moving feet. Young, active feet, old and feeble feet, timid feet, aggressive feet; the feet of the Christian and of the scoffer; honest feet and criminal; black feet and white, lordly and slave,—all had pressed eagerly across these old stone steps, leaving their impress there.

The prim old house had been built by Dr. John Bassett for a residence and an office. Then a room had been rented to a lawyer, for the doctor's family was small. The years passed on, the doctor's family became large, the demand for offices greater, and the doctor in a moment of inspiration moved his expanding family out, and let all the rooms for

offices ; and to-day the old brick building, two stories in height and of good dimensions as buildings range in the old cities, stands strong and firm, answering the twofold purpose of supplying office rooms to numerous lawyers and doctors, and serving as a monument to the existence of Dr. John Bassett, being called the Bassett Building.

Beneath one of the second-story windows of this building swings a smart sign on which you read J. C. Harris, Attorney, in large gilt letters, which are painfully straight-backed as they stalk across its surface. It is by far the most prosperous-looking sign of the many displayed on the building, for Lawyer Harris made a point of keeping his sign in good order. The young barristers in the building said that he renewed it with his flannels.

Harris had occupied this same office many years. It was plainly furnished with good, strong walnut desk and chairs, all showing much usage. In the arrangement of the interior, indeed, there was none of the fastidiousness that characterized the personal appearance of the man, none of the scrupulous care that was bestowed upon the sign which flaunted itself so proudly before the eyes of the public.

Harris had come to Richmond while he was still a young man. He had no friends in the city, and no one seemed to know anything of his previous life ; he came and settled quietly down to make a place for himself in the social and business world. For social life he cared next to nothing, but it was a means to an end—wealth and power. Steady and sure, was the motto he had inscribed on his heart in letters of fire. Now, after these twenty years

he knew that he had accomplished what in the beginning he had vowed to accomplish; that he had won the class of clients which he had set himself to win; had climbed to the place in the business world which he had said he would reach, and had gained the wealth he had determined to gain.

Was he satisfied? He said that he was. But are we ever wholly satisfied? Are we ever content? No, not even after we have attained our ambitions. We realize that they are the ambitions of yesterday. They look tame and spiritless beside the vital, full-breathed, crowding ambitions and desires of the now; and we are a little contemptuous toward ourselves that we should have striven after them, and wonder if we should again.

To-day Lawyer Harris sat alone in his office. He had told the office boy who answered the door and ran errands for him to say that he was not at home to all inquirers. This day should be his. He meant to look the future in the face. The past was over and he had conquered, he told himself exultingly. He had beaten down all obstacles and come off victor, and by that struggle he had grown stronger and more confident. He felt that he was prepared to meet any phase of life that he might elect, to live any kind of life he might desire; but we never care to live the same life over that we have once lived.

Lawyer Harris felt the force of this as he had never felt it before, and he resolved with all his obstinate courage that the future should bring him something that the past had not. Some new and pleasant element must enter into his life from now

on. What should it be? That was what he was going to settle to-day. He was no believer in fate or chance, no believer in luck, good or bad, such as is so blindly counted on by the great majority of people. It was but a chimera, a figment of the brain, he would say in argument; it was to our own wills we owed our happiness or our unhappiness, our success or failure, our fame or our infamy.

> "There is no chance, no destiny, no fate.
> Fortune smiles on those who work and wait."

Had he not proved the truth of this saying in his long struggle for success? Had he not by his strength of mind and resolute will held men in subjection and made them serve his purpose, bent them to his desire as the smith bends the iron to what shape he desires? He knew that he had, and a look of proud triumph crept into his cold gray eyes as he remembered pitilessly.

He thought of the gentle-natured man whom he had, by the sheer force of his iron will, consigned to the lonely, loveless life of invalidism and seclusion, that no suspicion might attach to him; for well he knew that Henry Steyne, truthful and honorable himself, would not aid his deception, but would speak the truth, if questioned. And he would be free; free not only to put aside his own name and take another, but free to avail himself of the benefits of his generous friend's bounty while he studied law and prepared himself for the struggle he meant to make with the world. And to the advancement of his ambition he had sacrificed the happiness and usefulness of Henry Steyne. He

thought of all this; yet even now, with the grave of his friend between them, he did not regret his work. He told himself that Henry Steyne would never have lived a life of energy and usefulness; that, had he been left to follow his own bent, he would have lived only in the past; that he was just the dreamy sort of idealist that could live the life of a recluse, the life of a hermit even, and not suffer, but be content, maybe happy in it. And had not he, Harris, taken excellent care of his temporal interests?—saved him all worry and trouble over them? In truth, Henry Steyne was indebted to him for his financial prosperity and for the ease it secured him to the end of his life. But all this belonged to the past.

"Henry Steyne is out of my life," he exclaimed with impatience. "That chapter is closed forever."

But the death of the master of Steyne House had brought about a change. It had given to the old plantation a new owner and to Harris a new client, and this client he meant to keep in his power, as he had kept the former one. He would continue to look after the business of the estate in the future, as he had looked after it in the past. He had always controlled it. In the beautiful old house and the restful indolence of its occupants he found an aroma of that sybaritic past when youth and light-heartedness had joined hands, running life's race with laughter and gladness. Did he sever this tie he would lose one of the pleasantest things in life. Besides, no one else knew anything about the affairs of the Steyne estate, and no one else could know unless he willed it. He did not intend to let slip

from him any of the good things which the past had brought him. The old plantation had afforded him a safe and sure refuge when he had been buffeted about and distracted by the criticisms of the world, and there had grown up in his heart a desire to possess it. He wanted to be able still to go there for rest, the rest there is in just getting away from people and events. The old plantation was a bit of the past that the heart had not been plucked out of.

He had long believed that Henry Steyne was without heirs. Yet, when he knew there was but one, and that one an unmarried daughter of the oldest brother of Henry Steyne's father, he was not discouraged. Doubtless she was but a timid, inexperienced spinster who would never dream of taking possession of the isolated old place; he should be able to buy it at his own figure and on his own terms. The calm-eyed, self-possessed young woman whom he found in the heir, and who quietly persisted in coming into the old homestead, was a factor in the circumstances not counted upon. But "all things come to him who waits" was a favorite quotation of the lawyer's, and what might he not have in that future which he was to-day planning so painstakingly, so wisely, as he believed. There should be no haste, there should be no mistakes, he said confidently.

Who so generously clothed as the egotist? One ample garment depending protectingly from his shoulders covers deftly from the wearer's vision each defect of his misshapen body, and all unknowing he hugs to his soul the belief that the repulsive deformity is perfect loveliness.

The thought of marriage came to Lawyer Harris that day. Marriage had been in his busy life an unconsidered factor, but now he did not drive the thought from him. Why should he not marry? he questioned. There was nothing to hinder. He was amply able to support a wife.

This train of thought, once set in motion, pushed boldly on into that prismatic future out of which he was to conjure whatever he might desire of luxurious happiness, of wealth, or fame; that future about which he had no misgivings, and into which no disappointment nor suffering was being reckoned.

Before he left his office that night he had said that he would marry, and it was Margaret Steyne who should be his wife. From that hour the sweet face of the gracious mistress of Steyne House possessed for him new attractiveness; to her surroundings a new interest and importance were attached.

It was early the next morning before breakfast, that he received the brief business letter from her. He thought it unnecessarily brief and uncommunicative. To say that he was disconcerted but mildly portrayed his state of mind. What was she thinking about? he questioned. Why had she not told him where the money came from? What business dealings could she be having with that firm about which she had not asked his advice?

She had not even left it to him to decide the place of deposit. She couldn't be thinking of taking the management of such things into her own hands? That idea he disposed of instantly, as being too preposterous; she had only been imprudent and

thoughtless. Still it was unsatisfactory, and he swore at the boy who blacked his boots, and kicked his landlady's dog as he went out of the door, as a mild sedative to his disturbed feelings.

Some one has said that everybody is insane one hour out of the twenty-four. We smile at the exaggeration, forgetting that it may be half a truth. If one will take the trouble to look below the surface he will find it is a settled law of nature that there comes to each of us—it may be at a different time—some hour in the twenty-four when our courage ebbs lowest; a certain daily-recurring period when we feel less able to meet life's discouragements and difficulties; an hour when all our skeletons are prone to come out of their closets and rattle their bones at us, whether we will it or not. This condition varies in intensity and definiteness according to temperament. The sympathetic and artistic, being most susceptible to all influences, respond most surely and faithfully to this law of nature and soonest discover its existence, but all are affected by it.

Now, Lawyer Harris had always dark views of life on rising in the morning. Strong man though he was, he had not a grain of courage to begin the day with, but by the time he had eaten his breakfast and smoked a cigar he had pulled up to his normal condition. So it was the morning of which we write. His annoyance passed away in the fumes of his cigar, and he was ready to write a letter to Miss Steyne by the noon mail, and did so, but made the mistake of writing to her as he would to a man to whom he wished to be conciliating, and of whom

he wished some information. He was not used to women, and had not the finesse to deal with them in business matters. He did not understand, nor could he conceive of the fine, unerring instinct by which they read between the lines. His was not an impressionable, receptive nature, and he did not accord it to others.

We have seen how his letter was read and analyzed by Margaret and Miss Price.

XIV.

A NEW GUARDIAN.

A fortnight had passed with the rapid flight of time since Mr. Thorne had made his last visit to Steyne House.

Margaret Steyne was thinking of this, and of the letter she had received two or three days before telling her that he would be there by the tenth. He was bringing with him a gentleman to look at the land in that neighborhood, and he had written thus early, he stated, that she might have time to notify her lawyer, did she desire his presence. She left her seat on the veranda and went around to the kitchen door where Hagar sat under the grapevine which shaded the doorway with an almost impenetrable canopy of emerald-green leaves. The black woman, in her bright red-and-yellow turban, was making all unconsciously a picturesque bit of color against the somber background of the old house. She rose and stood until her mistress had accepted the comfortable split-bottomed rocking-chair, and bidden her resume her seat on the bench.

"I came to tell you, Hagar," her mistress said, "that we are to have company to-morrow who will stay to dinner or luncheon; but I want you to make it a dinner."

"Massa Ha'is?" said Hagar interrogatively.

"Yes, Mr. Harris will be here, and two other

gentlemen also—Mr. Thorne and a friend of his. They are coming on business, and it may detain them some time. Did you ever think, Hagar," she went on presently, "that Mr. Harris was not always as kind to your master as he might have been? Did you think that your master was always glad to see him when he came to visit him?"

Hagar laid her knitting down on the bench beside her, that she might give her undivided attention to the questions her mistress asked.

"Wall now, I's had my doubts 'bout dat, 'deed I has; an' menny de times I ses to Gabe dat Massa Henry allus is moah pea't like an' chippersome when dat lawyah doan' cum heah for a right sma't spell."

"What did Gabe think?"

"Why, Gabe he neveh don' see noffin' 'tall; he say I dun got a maggit in my head: 'Whaffo massa hab him cum heah ef he doan' want him to come,' he says; an I dunno what to say den."

"Was Gabe fond of his master?"

"Lawd, missy, what fer ye ask dat?" exclaimed old Hagar, rousing up with the feeling that Gabe's reputation for loyalty was at stake.

"I meant to ask if he would be likely to notice particularly about the effect that Mr. Harris's visits had on his master," her mistress hastened to explain.

"Law, no, missus; dat am de tr'ubble. Gabe means right an' 'll do right, shuah, ef he on'y knows," Hagar declared loyally; "but he ain't cute," she added somewhat sarcastically, as a sense of Gabe's deficient perceptive faculties seemed borne in upon

her mind. "He allus hab to turn roun' an' step on hissef befo' he knows he's dar."

Margaret highly enjoyed the old woman's humorous analysis of her partner's character, which, odd as it was, enabled her to gather enough to confirm her belief in Gabe's unsuspicious, trusting nature.

Miss Steyne rose and went to the poultry-yard, where Gabriel was at work mending the fence which Miss Price had him put up, as he said, "to pe'teckt her chick'ns frum the gaud'n."

The old man was almost reverential in his manner toward his mistress, whose soft-spoken requests were more powerful and effective with him than any rough-handed command would have been. He now stood holding his straw hat in his hand, while she gave him some instructions that she wished him to observe the next day. They somewhat bewildered him, but he gathered that he was not to be too friendly with any of the gentlemen who were coming, and not to answer questions if he could avoid it. He promised that he would try his best.

"It is a matter of business," she explained, "and you will know some day, Gabriel, why I ask you to be careful."

"I doan' need to know whaffor; it's 'nuf fer me dat ye want me to do hit."

"I know that, Gabriel," said his mistress kindly.

With this she left him and went slowly along the edge of the wood. The slant rays of golden sunlight filtering though the boughs of the trees put shimmering glints into the brown hair, and cast a bright radiance over the soft white gown trailing

on the fragrant grass. The fair face was thoughtful, and the small white hands crossed and recrossed themselves restlessly. Fine, expressive, shapely hands they were, for no hard labor had ever roughened and misshaped them. Margaret Steyne had all her life performed that higher labor, the labor which exacts a tribute from mind and brain ; and faithful, tried servitors had they been to her, for they had given her food, shelter, and raiment, and more than these, a life replete with intelligent companionship. But she was not thinking of what her life had been, nor of what it had brought her, as she walked alone on the quiet hill, but of the business the details of which were to come before her to-morrow ; for she had all a womanly woman's shrinking repugnance from business, and in her dread would have been tempted to defer a consideration of the matter but that she realized its importance.

On the branch of a tree a blue-jay sat screaming the senseless, rasping scream which sets our teeth on edge. Little Axem, filled with the strange legends and beliefs of her people as to the wickedness of that bird, shouting, flung a branch at it in derision.

" Hi ! ye c'n screech an' scol' up dar to day, but to-morrer's Friday, an' ye'll hev t' go down t' hell an tote wood t' keep up de fiah. Dat's what ye gits fer bein' s' mean ; an some day ye'll neber git back. I 'spect dey'l bu'n ye up, fedders an' all ; good 'nuf fer ye, too," concluded the amiable little savage.

But the little savage, for all her impish, unaccountable ways, was a vigilant watchdog. Nothing

within her range of vision escaped detection. She saw now, before her mistress saw, some one on the hill. The man had stopped and was looking back toward the valley, and stood outlined against the sky in profile.

The slender figure in gray was familiar to her. It was Mr. Thorne, and as she looked he turned and came toward her. Facing the sun's rays he had pulled the soft felt hat low over his eyes, and did not know that anyone besides himself was on the lonely hill until the dog which walked by his side warned him. He looked up and saw Margaret. But Tom Thorne was not afraid to meet her. He knew that he had his feelings wholly under his control. He was master of himself now, as he had not been during the hours of that rainy afternoon. That small space of time was but a blissful fragment of life by itself, apart from the unhappy years that preceded it and the painful ones which must follow. He was decreed to love Margaret Steyne. He was conscious of that fatality in his heart, but he resolved to conquer both destiny and himself. He had conquered, he told himself. He had come to where he asked only a calm endurance, and he meant to endure as a strong man should, silently, unfalteringly.

Our lives are not measured by the hours or days we live, but by events and experiences, and measured by these Thorne felt he had lived years since he last saw her. He found himself wondering if he could ever again count time as he had done in the past.

Margaret stood quietly waiting for him. Never

had she looked more beautiful to him than she did at this moment. The white gown she wore brought out the slim, willowy figure in all the strength of its faultless outline.

He came up to her and shook hands in his usual courteous manner.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," he said; "I fancied myself alone on the hill but a moment ago."

"I had not expected the pleasure of welcoming you back this evening," she said cordially. "We had not looked for you before to-morrow. But what a magnificent dog!" she exclaimed in the next breath, as her eyes rested in admiration on the immense hound which stood beside him.

"You admire him?"

"Yes, I like him; he is of a peculiar color, but he is an aristocrat. What is he?"

"He is a Great Dane hound," Thorne replied; "and you could not pay him a higher compliment, nor a more just one, than to call him an aristocrat, for it is his birthright."

"He looks it. Do you hunt deer with him?"

"No; he is not a deerhound, and has never been trained to the chase. His training has been for a nobler purpose, to watch over and guard those he loves. He is from this time on going to take care of two ladies who live in a lonely, isolated place in Virginia."

Margaret did not yet understand of whom he was speaking.

"Come here, Rolfe!" he said.

The big drab-coated fellow stepped obediently to his side.

"Come and get acquainted with the members of your new household. This is a new mistress," he said, "and you are to take care of her."

She impulsively reached out her soft white hand, and laid it on the dog's head. The great fellow looked up with such a pleased look in his eyes that they were friends at once.

"But," began Margaret expostulatingly, "this is a valuable dog; I have heard say they were, and that they are hard to obtain in this country. We could not accept a dog of this kind as we would one——"

"As you would one of no value," Thorne interrupted. "But you have already accepted him, and he will never leave you now unless I take him away. I promised Miss Price a dog. This one came into my possession as unexpectedly as fortunately. He belonged to the wife of a friend. She died a short time ago, and my friend, though he did not wish to part with the dog, was obliged to do so as he was going to travel and expected to be away for some time. That is how he came into my possession. He is a valuable dog because of his good qualities. He is just the kind of dog Miss Price would like, I thought, so I brought him down; and I am glad you like him," he said in a tone quite as though the matter were settled.

"I had not thought of Rebecca's wanting a dog—" began Margaret, when he interrupted her by calling to the little black girl.

"Come here,——"

"Axem is her name," Margaret supplemented.

"Come here, Axem," Thorne called to her.

The small maid marched up to them with great dignity of manner, and with face so demure and grave that it was all they could do not to laugh.

"Here is a new dog. I want you to get acquainted. What do you think of him?"

The dog and the little darkey stood eying each other with about equal curiosity. The dog could have laid his muzzle on the top of her head with ease.

"Ye's big an' ugly, dat's what ye is," she said, speaking to the dog half defiantly; but her mistress, who knew every expression of that weird face, knew that she was fairly wriggling with delight she would not show, for she dearly loved a dog.

"There is not the least danger but Axem and Rolfe will get on all right," said Miss Steyne.

They turned toward the house, walking slowly as they talked. Axem, with the dog, had gotten a short way ahead, when they were surprised to see her challenge the great fellow to a race, by punching him in the ribs with her fist and telling him to "Come on." But what most amazed them was that the dog understood and accepted the challenge; and away they went, the dog bounding delightedly round and round the nimble budget of waving woolly braids and fluttering skirts.

"Really, Miss Steyne, your little savage is most amusing. I should rate her as unusually valuable on account of it."

"You have put a right valuation on Axem, Mr. Thorne. It requires a discriminating judgment to estimate her worth."

"Axem: what kind of name is that? I never

heard it before, and I thought I had heard the list pretty well through. It isn't negro, is it?"

"Well, I don't know its origin," said Miss Steyne. "Her name, they told me, is Axem Crease. Now, what I think is that she was named from those small round boxes which you see piled up at the stores, with 'Axle-Grease' printed on them. The letters are in bright colors, and must have attracted the attention of her parents or some one, and she was called as near that as they could remember. Or possibly she named herself; it would be like her to do it."

"I can believe that," said Thorne smiling.

"I have not asked you if you had a pleasant and successful trip, as I should have done before," said Margaret.

"I have had a successful trip, as we count such things, with plenty of hard work and very little pleasure. I was able to be at home but very little, less than two days altogether. I cannot properly say home, for it never seems that to me. My wife lives at an hotel, as she is not fond of a quiet life. I am unavoidably away so much of the time it is not surprising that she prefers it; she is happier there than she would be elsewhere."

It was the first time he had spoken of his wife to Margaret, and now he did not pursue the subject.

"Matters were in a snarl at that end of the road, owing to the loss of some papers through the mail," he said, "and it's twice the work to straighten out a business after it gets into a tangle than it is to keep it straight in the first place. You received my letter?"

"Yes, and I immediately wrote to Lawyer Harris."

"You have heard from him, I presume?"

"Yes, I had a letter this morning saying he would certainly be here to-morrow. I also asked him to bring down the papers connected with the estate, as I should like to know more about some of them."

"Did you tell him anything about the finding of coal, or anything about what he was wanted for?"

"Not a word. I did not consider it any concern of his what he was wanted for."

"Be careful, and do not antagonize him until you get all the information necessary, and secure possession of your papers. This is a matter in which you will have to act alone, for, from all I learn of him, he would bitterly resent your acting on the advice of anyone but himself. You will need all your coolness and courage to effect an amicable settlement of your affairs with him. But when you are in a position to do so, take the management into your own hands. You can, I'm sure, if you will only try, and it is the best way, believe me."

"I have thought the matter over carefully, Mr. Thorne, and I realize that I must act alone; that neither you nor anyone else can help me, however much you may wish to do so. I will be careful not to offend him until I get the papers into my possession and can do without his aid."

"I know that you will," said Thorne assuringly.

"But you know I have had no training," she said doubtfully; "I know so little about business of any kind, and I shrink from it; it's a perfect bugbear to me."

"Never mind; keep up your courage. I will see

that you start straight, and will help you any time you may need help, if you will only let me know," he said.

"You are generous, and with such encouragement I can do no less than try," she returned hopefully.

"Remember the instructions in your cousin's letter," said Thorne. "He would not have said what he did without good reasons. With a reticent nature such as his, there must have been a strong impulse back of saying anything so unpleasant."

"I think with you, that my cousin must have felt even more strongly than he wrote, and I will do my best to bring about a change."

"That is a promise, Miss Steyne. You've burned your ships."

"There is no particular valor in that, for with you and Rebecca behind me, what might I not undertake?" she said cheerfully.

"Don't overrate your reserve force," he cautioned. "It's bad policy; it was so counted in the army."

"No danger of doing that. It is a combination that cannot be overestimated. You will map out the campaign, and Rebecca will see that I obey orders. When I feel irresolute or inclined to shirk I have only to look at her back. Did you ever notice Rebecca's back?" she asked, with a smile.

"I don't know that I have; that is, not particularly."

"Well, do so," said Margaret. "A commanding officer with that kind of a back couldn't order a retreat; his men would not believe he meant it.

That straight, resolute back preaches a sermon on duty and heroism such as no one can resist."

"There is no danger of a retreat in this case, then," said Thorne ; and for the first time he laughed merrily.

"Not in the least," she declared. "Go on with your campaign ; I am bound to the car."

They came up to the gate, where Axem with the dog was waiting for them. Miss Price, looking out of the window, saw them, and when later Margaret came in alone, she asked what had become of Mr. Thorne.

"Why, he went around to the back of the house to find Gabriel. He brought that dog he promised you ; and truly, Rebecca, you have reason to be proud, for he is one of the finest dogs I ever saw anywhere. You ought to go right out to see him and thank him for such a treasure."

Now, it didn't seem just clear to Miss Price that anybody had promised her a dog, or that she had ever said anything about wanting one ; but she wisely said nothing, and went out to the hollow square in the center of the negro quarters, where Mr. Thorne was in consultation with Gabriel as to the best location for a kennel, with Axem and Hagar, who had joined the cavalcade as it passed the kitchen door, for auditors and critics.

Miss Price had a warm welcome for her favorite, and when she saw the splendid dog she forgave him on the instant whatever duplicity she might suspect him of having practiced in her name. Why, she would sleep more soundly for just knowing that he was about, she asserted.

"I knew you would like him," said Thorne. "He has been well trained as a watch-dog; and while he is affectionate, you need not fear that anyone will enter the house or molest anything when you are absent."

"Now, thet is a dawg!" exclaimed Hagar with high approval in her tones. "He's pow'ful big, 'n putty too; none ob yer li'l fis'es what go's yappin' roun' at noff'n'."

"Umph!" muttered Axem antagonistically. "Jes de colo' ob an old stock'n, an' sich a name! Why doan' ye call 'im Tige, or sumpin' spect'ble-like, fer folks's dawg?"

"Yes, ye lubly sherub," exclaimed Hagar, turning wrathfully on the little tormentor; "we's all saw you'ns dawg. Ye'll die sum day an' go ter twament jes' cos ye's so mean."

But Axem, perfectly happy in having aroused the old woman's wrath, strolled off to another part of the yard, and Hagar, turning to Thorne full of indignation, exclaimed:

"Hab somebody done tol' ye what dat lam' ob Satan done jes' las' week? Hab somebody done tole ye?"

"Something unusually wicked?" asked Thorne, amused as much at the old woman's wrath as at the mosquito-like attack of the little black maid.

"Me'cy, me'cy, I sesso. One day she heah Gabe say, 'Pity dat missus didn't brung a dawg erlong when she cum,' and de next day we miss her an' d'no whar she wuz. Aftah while she cum in ti'ed, an' say she done fall asleep in de bawn. I s'pected she wuz tellin' a whopper. De nex' mawnin' aftah

brexfus' she cum in de house, an' walk up t' de missus berry top-lofty-like. 'Cum out an' see yer dawg,' she sez. Missus looked s'prised like, but got up an' went out long wif her to de fardest one ob de cab'ns, and dar, tied wif a string, wuz de meanes' low-down lil' yaller dawg yer eber set eyes on to. An dat wuzn't all; dar in a conah, in a kin' ob nes', wuz 'bout a dozen puppies, an bein' mos'ly spotted dey looks lak dar's mo' dan fo'ty ob em, dey suttenly did. Golly! wasn't missus 'prised, an didn't she laugh? Den she say dat Missis Becky had great min' fer 'margencies, and she leabs it wif her an Gabe, and she went in de house. Missy Becky she done laugh out loud. Dey did look funny; jes' a mess ob tails and whines."

"And how did Gabriel take it?" Thorne asked.

"Gabe? My, oh my! I done fink he lose all his piety, he wuz so mad. He say she done it jes' fer debil."

Miss Price laughed in sympathy with Thorne's hearty laugh, which proved so infectious that old Hagar forgot her anger, and with her fat sides shaking trotted off to the house in search of scraps of meat for the new dog. Gabriel came from the barn with an armful of straw, and having seen that Rolfe's kennel was made comfortable, they returned to the house.

"A dog was just what we needed, and we didn't know it," declared Miss Price.

"What do you suppose is the matter with Gabe, Miss Steyne?" Thorne asked a little later. "He was not at all like himself this evening."

"Not like himself? How so?"

"Well he was—he appeared rather unfriendly, I thought; not as I ever saw him before. I almost felt that I had somehow fallen out of the old fellow's good graces."

Then, to her confusion, it flashed over Margaret that Gabe was trying to carry out faithfully the instructions he had received. But how was she to excuse to her guest the behavior of her old servant? She had not meant him to take her instruction so literally, but how was he to know? So, with the best grace she could command, she said cheerfully:

"Why, even Gabe has moods. Would you think it? When he is not feeling well he does not take it like other folk and moan and complain; he only grows solemn. Perhaps his rheumatism is troubling him," she said, feeling like the hypocrite she was, for while she had only exaggerated a peculiarity of the old man's, yet exaggeration did not come easy to her.

"Gabriel with moods!" laughed Thorne. "Well, I am always having my theories overturned. I had fancied his nature too simple to be within the possibility of moods."

Margaret was glad that Miss Price entered the room at this moment, thereby preventing further conversation on the subject.

"When did you return to Walsingham, Mr. Thorne?" Miss Price asked.

"We came by the morning train; Mr. Morgan, the gentleman of whom I wrote, is with me. He wanted to take a day to look at the land in the neighborhood. If matters turn out as he expects he thinks of buying land and settling his family

here." Turning to Miss Steyne he said: "He has given me an offer for a hundred acres of your land, Miss Steyne, and I came up to submit his proposition to you, as well as two others from our company, for your coal; in fact, to close the affair if you accept our proposals. I have them written out with contracts attached."

"Do you think we may look for opposition from my lawyer?"

"I think that we may expect almost anything," said Thorne.

An hour later a decision had been arrived at, and Thorne had taken his leave. After the morrow's business was completed he meant that his visits should cease entirely, if that were possible. He would not make life harder for himself than he could help; it was hard enough now.

XV.

A MAN OF BUSINESS AND A WOMAN.

It was early in the forenoon when Lawyer Harris presented himself at Steyne House. He looked unusually well in a fresh suit of light tweed, the modest white necktie, with the white carnation in his buttonhole, serving to tone down his somewhat florid face and to impart to his person an air of quiet elegance.

This was the lawyer in a new light to Margaret; and she was obliged to allow before the day was over that he was not only an attractive-looking man, but an agreeable one when he willed to be. Though there was a feeling of antagonism toward him, she had allowed him to find her welcome a degree more friendly and her manner a trifle more suave than it had been before.

From the increased friendliness of Miss Steyne's manner, the lawyer's heart was filled with the most sanguine hopes for the success of his plan for the future. His vanity had been ministered to in her reception of him, and he was in a very gracious mood—as Margaret had meant he should be—when she began to unfold her business plans. And her skill in the management of the matter, as Miss Price afterward told it to Thorne, would have done credit to an ambassador of state.

"You see, Margaret told him first of the sale of

the strip of land to the railroad company, taking care to impress upon his notice that it was a case where it was necessary that she should decide at once. Then, when she had sent the check she had not explained because it was so small a matter, and she was in hopes of seeing him before long, and could do so in person more satisfactorily. Now she would like to know if she had done right.

"'I must say,' he replied, and approval shone out all over his face, 'that you have shown excellent judgment in the matter, Miss Steyne, excellent indeed.'

"It was like a play I once saw," said Miss Price, "the only one I ever did see, but I thought of it right off.

"Then Margaret, in that quiet way of hers, told him how the survey corps had discovered the coal, and had sent an expert to examine it, who had pronounced it of good value for mining. And now they had sent her a proposition to buy or lease the coal, and she had asked him to come up that she might consult with him, as she felt she could do nothing further without his advice.

"I could see by the glint in Margaret's eye that it went dreadfully against the grain for her to say these things to him, but she would go through with it when it seemed expedient for her to do it.

"'Well, well! this is important,' Harris exclaimed. 'I am glad indeed that you were so far-sighted, so thoughtful, as to send for me;' and he rubbed his hands together and patted his knee lovingly, as pleased as a little darky boy with a bag of glass marbles.

"Now, that lawyer isn't slow by any means," declared Miss Price. "He is a shrewd business man with good judgment, but he has such a good opinion of himself, and is so easily flattered, that the moment his mind is turned on himself he is warped and loses his balance. I know a number of men, it is surprising how many, who are strong in every other way, but who in that one particular thing are weak as the weakest woman. It is easier to flatter a man than a woman."

"Are you not a little hard on us?" queried Thorne.

"No," answered Miss Price, looking seriously over her silver-bowed spectacles at him. "Why should I be hard on anybody? We all have our failings."

"But surely men and women are alike in—in that particular weakness. They must be, you know. Human nature is the same," he insisted.

"No, men's natures and women's natures are not near so much alike as we are all the time thinking they are. Now, when we find that out, and stop judging each other by ourselves, there will be less unhappiness in the world. But I was telling you about their conversation. Where was I? Well, he congratulated her with much heartiness on her good fortune, smiling that double-meaning smile of his which I abominate," added Miss Price energetically as she took off her glasses and turned them the other side up.

"'You say that they sent you a proposition; whom did they send it by?' Harris asked.

"'It is in writing,' Margaret said, not replying

directly to his question. 'In fact, there are two of them. I have them here.'

"She went over to the secretary and unlocked it. Then she stopped and said, as she looked at the box above the fireplace :

"'I wonder what my cousin ever kept in that box, there on the mantel. And is it not strange that I have never found the key to it?' she asked, giving him one of those straight looks of hers.

"'Why, yes,' he said, without the blink of a change in his face, 'it is a little strange that you did not find the key somewhere in the secretary. And you did not?'

"'No,' she said, shortly ; and turning to the secretary she fetched the papers and gave them to him. He reached into his waistcoat pocket for his spectacles and had them pretty near out, when I suppose he thought he didn't want to be seen using them, and shot them back into his pocket. I knew then that he was courting Margaret, or had it in his mind to do it, and I just made my mind up, right then and there, that if there was to come a time or place where I could take a hand in that business I should give my whole mind to it."

"I shall not fear the result if you do," laughed Thorne. "The blood of our revolutionary ancestors forever!"

"I don't know," continued Miss Price, "whether or not he could see real well without his spectacles, but he was a good while looking over the papers, reading them backward and forward. At last he seemed satisfied and stopped reading. Margaret next asked him if he thought she should consider

the offer at present. Could she not hope to do better later on? Then he soon convinced her that she could not, and that it was better to let them have it. Of the two propositions the second was the one to accept, the very one she had accepted the evening before. Margaret dared not look at me straight, but I knew by the look of her eyes that she had all she could do not to laugh. She told him that she was so glad that he was satisfied, for the gentlemen were to be here sometime to-day for their answer.

"I saw her look toward the window. I knew she was thinking that you might be here any minute, and she had not got hold of the papers which she had asked him to bring and was so anxious to get before the other business came up. I saw she was becoming worried, for she did not even know if he had brought them; but no one else would have seen it.

"'Did you think,' she at last says, as calm and pleasant-like as though she had not much interest in the matter, 'when I asked you to bring all those papers that you were to have a tiresome day's work before you?'

"'Not at all, though I could not imagine what you wanted with them;' he said; and I must admit," confessed Miss Price, "that he was very civil about it.

"'Do you suppose that I am without curiosity?' she asked, smiling a little. 'I don't even know how long the place has been in the possession of my ancestors, how they came by it, or whom they got it of. And I wanted my cousin's will to look at occasionally; he seems always so far away from

me, almost a mythical person. I wish I might have known him, but as I did not, I asked you to bring down the papers that I could look them over in hopes that it might induce in me a feeling of reality of kinship with my people. I hope you did not think me troublesome?' She looked down the road and saw you coming up the hill path.

"'No, no,' said he; and with that he brought out a lot of papers from his breast-pocket and laid them on the table, slowly spreading them out before her.

"'These are the railroad securities; this is bank-stock which you hold in the Second National Bank of New York.'

"'Is that a good investment?' she asked.

"'Couldn't be better,' he replied. 'I made that investment for Henry before the war, and the stock has doubled in value.'

"'And this railroad stock, is that paying dividends?'

"'As good as gold: never missed a dividend, and pays semi-annually. Here are other papers, some of them of but minor importance.'

"You were at the gate; Margaret knew it, but went on quietly drawing the papers toward her, opening them out and mixing them up. Then we heard your voices and looking up she said,

"'There are the gentlemen who were to come about the coal land, and as we shall have to postpone our conversation for the present I will just place these papers here until they are gone, when we can resume;' and gathering them in her hands she whisked them into the secretary, locked it, and

was at the door meeting you with such a formal manner that it must have surprised you not a little. It was not at all like the pleasant, cordial welcome Lawyer Harris received, and he must have been mightily pleased. And—well, you know the rest." She ended abruptly.

He did know the rest. It was a perfectly conventional welcome, such as would be given to entire strangers, that he and Mr. Morgan had received from Margaret Steyne.

Mr. Morgan was a large man, rather coarse-looking, but with a good-natured, shrewd, used-to-the-work look about him, which begat confidence. This Miss Steyne observed as she acknowledged the introduction. She led the way to the library and introduced him to the lawyer, who chose to adopt a patronizing manner, which the large man resented but was unable to defend himself from; then to Miss Price, who at once set him at ease by giving him the largest chair in the room.

Thorne, who had stopped in the hall to replace his hat on the deer-horns from which it had tumbled off, now walked into the room, and Margaret was saying, "Mr. Harris, Mr. Thorne—" then something in the faces of the two men stopped her. At sight of Thorne Lawyer Harris turned livid, and an unmistakable look of fear shot from his eyes; then as suddenly it was succeeded by one of fury.

Thorne's face at first showed pure surprise and incredulity, but it became coldly contemptuous and his voice no less so.

"You!" he exclaimed, but so low that only Margaret and Harris himself heard the exclamation.

Yet the others instinctively felt the strained situation between the two men.

It had been as the clash of steel weapons, sharp and instantaneous, for at a bound Thorne recovered himself, and with a cool nod to Harris walked across the room to speak to Miss Price, who had risen and was pushing the chairs about in different positions, in a vain endeavor to tide over the awkward situation, wondering within herself what it meant. Those two men had known each other before; it was plain they had not been friends, and were not likely to be.

"Eh!" thought Mr. Morgan, "something's up. Don't like the old starched-up humbug, do you, boss? I'd like to see you have it out, though, you two;" and he covertly looked the two men over. "Two to one on our plucky manager; he'd thrash the ground with him in no time." And he fell to wondering if there was the least possibility of any such good luck as a bout between the two; of course, not here in the presence of the ladies, but if there should be a chance—

Thorne had never been more astonished in his life than when he stepped into the room and stood face to face with Harris. The audacity of the man stunned while it maddened him. He knew now what Henry Steyne had endured, and no longer needed an explanation of his strange retirement from an active, useful life; he had it before him. Here was the octopus that had fastened its suckers about the heart of its victim with a deathless tenacity. "The damned villain!" he muttered.

While he was savage with himself that in the

surprise of the moment he had lost his self-control, and thereby antagonized Harris and so jeopardized Miss Steyne's interests, he realized that regret would not help the matter; he must do the best he could for her. And now the business training of the man told; it enabled him to think and to decide quickly. By the time he had shaken hands with Miss Price and found a seat, he had mapped out a plan of action.

But to no one of that small company did the encounter between the two men bring such dismay as it brought to Margaret. With these two men antagonistic, enemies maybe, what might she not expect? And there was no room for doubt as to the state of feeling between them. She had seen Harris quail under the look of contempt which Thorne had flashed upon him, and he was not one to ignore or forgive a thrust of that kind. He would hate with undying bitterness one by whom his moral nature was laid bare. Now he might baffle her altogether in the accomplishment of the purpose she had in view. At the thought something rose up within her which you might call the courage of desperation, a courage that would compel events. She was nerved to a keen watchfulness of the situation, and to the exercise of all the tact and discernment which her powers could command.

She did not sit down, but went over to the table where the lawyer sat, and with an air of the most charming concern for his comfort, moved the table with his assistance nearer the centre of the room, "where it was cooler and the light more favorable," she said; and by her unconscious manner she

smoothed his ruffled plumage, in some indefinable way leading him to believe that she had not seen or understood the little scene in which he had been an actor. Her womanly tact gave him back his self-respect, under which he quickly recovered his mental balance.

"Now, Mr. Morgan, if you please, you may draw your chair to the table here and I will open the window just back of you there."

She passed close to Thorne's chair as she spoke, giving him a pleading little look, which almost overwhelmed the already remorseful man. In the glance he flashed back, his expressive eyes spoke so plainly the encouragement his lips could not utter, that Margaret was reassured.

"Allow me," he said, in coldly courteous tones; and he rose and opened the window for her.

"If you will take that end of the settle, Mr. Thorne," she said, indicating by a gesture the end next the lawyer, "I think you will be more comfortable."

He had no sooner dropped into the seat than he saw that it was a clever move on her part, as it gave him a desirable position. He was now at right angles with the lawyer, where he could have an unobstructed view of his face without moving; Lawyer Harris would have to turn half round when he looked at him with the light on his face, while Thorne's back was to the window.

Mr. Morgan proceeded to tell the lawyer of the proposition he had come to lay before Miss Steyne for the hundred acres. The usual talk as to terms and payments followed, and they had about reached

an agreement when Mr. Morgan surprised the lawyer somewhat.

"Now," he said, "as I am only the tail to the kite, I guess we'll have to wait a bit and see what my lady is going to do about the other part of the bargain;" and he laughed pleasedly at his own speech.

"Do you mean," said Harris, "that you do not want the land if the coal is not sold or leased to the company?"

"You're about right; that's my business, opening up and superintending coal lands. I don't want a home where I've no business. Life's too short to make a fortune out of these Virginia hills, even if I knew how to do it. Now, my friend, what have you got to say about it?" he asked turning to Thorne and bringing him into the conversation, to which, up to this time, he had been but a listener.

"Do you mean about our company purchasing or handling this property?"

"Yes, just that."

"Well, I have nothing whatever to say. Miss Steyne has two propositions from our company. It is for her to say. I am here to receive her answer and close the contract if an arrangement is reached."

Here Miss Price, who had left the room a short time before, returned and announced dinner.

"It seems," said Miss Steyne, "to be Hagar's say just now, and I will defer mine until after dinner."

"Why, I told 'em down at the tavern that we'd be back for our dinner," blurted out Morgan, to

whom the idea of dining with strange ladies was almost too trying to be considered calmly.

"But you didn't take into consideration how long it would take you to get up the hill, Morgan; you were a full hour, weren't you?" asked Thorne banteringly.

"Blast the hills; there's too many of 'em any way; we're always running up against 'em everything we do;" and the grumbler wound up with a jolly laugh.

Lawyer Harris was asked by the mistress to sit at the head of the table, which quite accorded with his ideas as to the proper arrangement of the guests, and the distinction bestowed upon him induced in him a more social manner. He let go somewhat of his haughty bearing. Old Hagar, all unknowing, did much to assist her mistress in smoothing things out comfortably by the excellent dinner she set before her guests, for Hagar was one of the best of that class of old Virginia cooks whose virtues have been heralded to posterity through song and story.

To the relief of all, the dinner was not a drag. Mr. Morgan forgot his timidity, and talked incessantly until they returned to the library. Then Margaret took up the subject of business, and surprised Thorne, as well as the lawyer, by taking the bit in her teeth, and clearing with one bound all ditches and hurdles. As a turfman would say, she took her head and bolted.

"I have carefully examined both propositions from your company, Mr. Thorne, and prefer the second, which I have decided to accept."

The announcement was received by her hearers

with various emotions : by Thorne in silence, though he felt like giving a view halloa ; by Mr. Morgan with " That's something like business for a woman," emphasizing his words with a resounding slap on his knee ; while the lawyer was so astonished that his jaw dropped with the surprise of it. He seemed for the moment not to know what to say. As Miss Price facetiously put it, " He looked like a child who had let a bird get out of its hand."

But Lawyer Harris had found himself, and braced his energies for a resistance that would accord with his dignity and importance as Miss Steyne's adviser.

" My dear Miss Steyne, you are rash. I do not consider the contract worded as it should be ; it is faulty and should be changed. Some of the clauses should be more explicit."

" I thought you seemed entirely satisfied with it this morning when we went over it. You said that that was the one to accept," said Margaret, looking at him with those straightforward brown eyes, which Thorne thought held as much dare in them as was safe for the owner to show.

But here the fun of it was too much for Mr. Morgan, and he laughed uproariously with tears. Then they all laughed a little with him, and so came down easily. This, however, did not hinder Harris from contending and objecting, but as Miss Steyne had checkmated him by accepting the proposition, he could only squirm and quibble over the contract, which he did, asking to have unimportant changes made until they were weary almost to insurrection before the papers were finally signed and the business completed.

As soon as possible Thorne, with Mr. Morgan, took his departure, saying that he must leave that evening for the upper end of the road. To Miss Price's invitation to call when he was in the neighborhood, he said :

"I thank you ; I should be most happy, but I have been absent so long I fear I shall find it necessary to remain there and place Morgan at this end of the line, as it is his intention to build and bring his family down. I can recommend him to you as an honorable business man ; you may rely upon him fully ;" and with the conventional thanks for hospitality he bowed to Margaret, a bow which might include the lawyer or not, as he chose to accept it, as he stood talking to Miss Steyne.

And so he left them as they stood ; the man exultant and rejoicing, the woman with a little chill feeling at her heart that he should leave in that way. She felt so helpless with all those papers there in the secretary, which he had urged her to get from the lawyer. But she knew that, more than all, the mystery of the morning was on her heart, and she was hoping and longing for some explanation of what had taken place. Would it ever come ? She wanted to be alone that she might think over the events of the day. How much longer must she bow to the yoke of this man's presence ? She put her hands up to her eyes ; she felt that she could not endure much more.

"Oh, how tired I am !" she exclaimed. "Do not let us talk another word of business to-day."

"Certainly not," he replied, promptly. "You've had enough of business. I don't wonder you are

tired; you are not used to it, and it has been abominably hot to-day."

"If you will excuse me, Mr. Harris, I will go up to my room for a short rest."

"That's what you should do," he said quickly, "and I will go out on the veranda to smoke."

It suited the purpose of Lawyer Harris to have time to think, time to get used to the new order of things. Miss Steyne was now a rich woman, richer than he had ever thought she would be, even with the best of management given to her estate. Was there such a thing as luck? He had scoffed at the mention of the subject. But could there be such a thing as fate, a condition of things carved out for us which we have been powerless to alter, but which has governed and shaped our lives to some certain end? He had all his life called it but the vaporings of silly fools, but the events of the day had startled him.

"Gad! that was the worst scare I've had in many a day," he muttered. "How the devil did Tom Thorne ever come to turn up here, and in that business too? Why wasn't he killed in the war, curse him? Who would ever have thought of running slap up against him here? Lost all his money by the war, I suppose, and the money he married for, too. Well, I never believed he got any love with his wife, but I haven't lost anything by waiting."

A smile crept over the lawyer's face which would have acted on Miss Price's nerves like a galvanic battery had she seen it.

"No, I haven't lost anything by waiting. I

wouldn't trade places with him to-day. Who has lost in the long run, Thompson Thorne? What a chance it is that he is not a friend of the family, and that he is not likely to meet her again! He might have spoken to-day and let out something; but he was not meddlesome, I must say, and showed that he thought it none of his business; and it isn't by a long sight." But Harris writhed as he thought of the coldly contemptuous manner of Thorne, and he had not dared to resent it.

"I shall let no grass grow under my feet; no chances taken here if I know it. This is a business of the utmost importance, and I shall give my mind to it. I wonder where Gabe is?"

The lawyer brought his feet down with decision from their comfortable position on the railing, went down the steps, and strolling round passed the kitchen door. He had all at once remembered that there were other people in the world. Possibly this girl whom he meant to marry had admirers, a lover even. The thought was disquieting, but it was timely. He could not question Miss Steyne, and Miss Price was impossible, the lawyer decided very promptly, as he thought of the quiet force of those shrewd gray eyes. But he must know, as far as he could, what he would have to meet in this new venture, and he set out to find Gabe.

Yes, Harris was going to do just what Margaret had thought he might do—question her servants about her friends and those who visited her, or ask for any other information he might wish to obtain.

The old man was not at the back of the house, and he went on to the barn. But Gabriel was not to be

found, for, at Hagar's suggestion, his mistress had set him to do some work at the other side of the wood, and Hagar had given him his dinner to carry with him.

"Fer, ye see," she said to him, "de gentry'll be a-boder'n roun' jes' at noontide, an' ye might hab ter wait a spell ef ye cum in. I'll hab a good warm supper fer ye; ye sha'n't lose nothin' by missin' yer dinner."

And Gabe, secretly pleased, but stoutly asserting that he was not "one of dem az gloried in riotous libin', an' digged dar grabes wid der teef," gathered up his tin pail and jogged off contentedly to pile brush at the back of the wood.

By being out of the way the old man escaped a trying interview; for, between the spirit of deference which had become habitual to him in the long years he had served Lawyer Harris as his master's friend and guest, and his desire to obey faithfully the request of his mistress, he would have made a miserable failure. "Made a mess ob it," as Hagar said.

That was why Harris did not see him when he looked for him. But he did see Axem, as she was playing out by the dog's kennel.

"Ah! a new member added to the household, I suppose," was his mental comment; and he walked over to the old slave quarters. Now, what the lawyer did not see was Miss Price in her poultry yard, standing just back of the cabin which had been made the temporary quarters of the dog Rolfe.

As Miss Price told it to Margaret a little while after, the lawyer came strutting up and stood look-

ing at the child, his hands thrust in his pockets and the smoke of his cigar trailing over the shoulder in a lazy blue twist.

"'Where did you come from?' he asked.

"She didn't make any reply, only looked at him, the whites of her eyes showing just the least mite. She has a way of turning them so they twist a little, and she nearly always does it when she means mischief. I declare my heart was in my mouth, for I didn't know what she would say, and it wa'n't no ways certain whom she would worst. I kept still and waited; I thought if he did ask questions it was best done then, and we would know what was said.

"'What's your name?' he again addressed her directly.

"'Axem,' she replied, having made up her mind to be accommodating in a small way. Then his eye fell on Rolfe in the doorway.

"'Whose dog is that?'

"'Missy Pwice's dawg.'

"'Where did she get him?' he asked, with a kind of suspicion in his voice.

"Now comes the genius of the child, for she spoke right up.

"'From her sweethawt.'

"'From her sweetheart,' he said, wonderfully pleased apparently. 'Who is her sweetheart, and where is he?'

"'Off whar she cum from, but he hain't a-goin' ter marry her 'tall,' declared the little imp.

"'Why isn't he going to marry her?'

"'Oh, cos she jes' fool long so, and wouldn't say

yes, an he got ti'ed wait'n'. She wuz gitt'n' ole ennyhow, an' so he jes' went'n done mar't t'other'n.'

"'And he sent this one the dog,' he said, laughing one of those chuckles he is so fond of doing.

"'Nawp,' she replied with indifferent politeness, 'he done git de chills an die, an she done sen' a man an' buyed 'im a spell ago.'"

Margaret leaned her face on her hands against the jamb of the door, and a peal of silvery laughter rang through the old house.

"Now that young imp knew I was standing there and could hear every word she said, and she told that straight through without break or halt. I never admired her before, but I did then; I like excellence, even in lying;" and Miss Price smiled in grim enjoyment of Axem's performance.

"Oh, Axem, thou hast made much merit to-day, as our Buddhist brother reckons," exclaimed her mistress.

"That was not all, though it was the best piece of work she did. He asked her if she saw the two men here to-day. She answered by a nod.

"'Have they ever been here before?'

"'Neber see de fat one befo'.'

"'But the other?' he asked suspiciously.

"'Once he fotch a paper to missy.'

"There was a deep breath of relief from the lawyer, and a satisfied look on his face. I had slipped along by the cabin where I could see through a crack. He gave Axem some money and was turning away, but thought of something more.

"'Do the ladies have any sweethearts come to see them?'

"'Not af'r de perfess'r g'way,' she said carelessly.

"'The professor? Where was he from? Tell me about it;' and he looked anxious again.

"'He had orful long legs,' she asserted solemnly.

"'Is that all you know?' pursued this high-minded gentleman.

"'Guess dat's why missy send he off, cos he legs so long. Gosh! dat's her callin' me; I has t' go to de pos' offis, 'n I done f'git.'

"With that she darted away leaving him standing there looking at the end of his cigar. It was getting a little awkward for me; if he should go on past the cabin I stood a first-rate chance of being discovered, and I didn't want that; but luck favored me. He turned about and came back to the house. I skirted along back of the cabins and hurried in the front way to tell you. Now, everything is all right so far, and you have only to go down and be civil for a half-hour longer and you will be free," comforted Miss Price.

"How could it have happened?" exclaimed Margaret. "What chance was it that Axem did not tell anything she ought not, nor that we did not want told? Why did she deny seeing Mr. Thorne but once? And about the dog! She could not have understood anything about the matter."

"She may have heard us talking, and caught a word that way," suggested Miss Price.

"I can't think it possible. There is but one explanation; she is shrewd and must have guessed his intention to draw her out, and she had her amusement. But it is perfectly marvelous how it all could have turned out so fortunately, though it

does not matter so much now, since the business of to-day is closed and the papers are signed, and I have gotten possession of my other papers. Yet I would not have him know who advised me to the step, nor that I was advised by anyone," said Margaret. "I do not want to make him the enemy of anyone who befriends me."

"I can't understand it," said Miss Price, thoughtfully.

"Nor can I. I wish I could. But we must not stand here talking longer," said Margaret. "I am worried over what occurred to-day, and Mr. Thorne leaving so hurriedly and strangely, when I looked to him for help about my business. Isn't it strange that he did not tell us that he knew Harris, when we have talked about him so often? I am puzzled and annoyed;" and the straight brows were knit in thoughtfulness for a moment, then she turned and said:

"Rebecca, will you find Axem and send her to me? And have you a letter or anything you wish to send to the post-office? I am going to send her down to Walsingham for several reasons. He must not know that I didn't want to send Axem to the post-office, which was a pure fabrication on her part, to be sure, and I want to know whether or not Mr. Thorne and Mr. Morgan have gone from Walsingham. But most of all I want to know that Harris does go to Richmond by the evening train. I am going to trust Axem. There is no one else."

"I have no letter quite ready, but I have one begun to Sam Byres about the taxes on my house.

I will find Axem and send her to you ; then I will finish my letter ;" and Miss Price departed alertly.

Axem was promptly in the room. When she knew that she was to be sent to the post-office she was as happy, perhaps, as she had ever been in all her short life. She quickly understood what was wanted of her, and promised to "do it shuah."

"You know the lawyer. You will not make a mistake?" questioned her mistress anxiously.

"'Deed I does ; um walk dis way, like ole teckey gobl'r ;" and the slim little black maid mimicked the walk of the pompous lawyer with comical precision. "I'd like t' wun 'tween he'ns legs 'n fro' 'im down ; good nuf fer 'im ; 'im damn mean man."

"Why, Axem!" exclaimed her mistress, "you must not say such things."

"Ye doan' like ter hab me?"

"No, I do not. You understand, now, that you are to take the letter which Miss Price gives you, and give it to Mr. Smith. Then wait until the train comes in ; give the bag to him, and if there are any letters he will put them in the bag. Do not take them out, but come right home to me. Will you do it?"

"I cross my heart I do it, missy," she declared, her eyes shining like black stars.

When this form of vow has been used by a negro child, there is nothing more to be said, nothing can be said that is more solemn or binding. Why they believe that making the sign of a cross above the heart makes a promise deathless and sacred, I cannot say. I never heard any reason given, save that it did. Then again, her mistress would have

been entirely secure in trusting Axem to carry anything safely, for a negro is peculiar in that he will safely convey anything that may be given him to deliver, or anything given into his care as a trust, no matter how great the temptation to him, nor how unhesitatingly he would have stolen the articles before.

Margaret went down to the veranda and joined the lawyer, who by this time had returned to its sheltered coolness, having concluded his conversation with Hagar at the kitchen door only when he felt satisfied there was nothing more that he could learn. Taking it altogether, he felt well pleased with everything, and at the end of a half hour, when he took his leave, he had not changed his mind, the papers left behind being ample excuse for another visit which he intended shortly to make.

XVI.

A FLANK MOVEMENT.

THE sun had sunk behind the mountain, and the light was beginning to fade. Miss Steyne and Miss Price on the veranda waited anxiously the return of the girl, and while they looked down the path where it wound into sight round the hill, there came into view a little black speck, which they knew to be Axem. There was no delay, no loitering, but stepping briskly along she was coming under full sail, with the blue jeans mail-bag flapping at her side. A few minutes more, and she had reached the goal, the veranda, and her mistress's presence, and never jockey brought his colors under the wire a winner, with more real pride than did the little black maid deliver up her charge to her mistress.

There were two letters, one for Miss Price and one for herself. Hers bore the postmark of a Northern city. She did not open it, it could wait; it was not what she had hoped for, and she turned to her little messenger.

"Well, Axem, did you see Mr. Thorne and Mr. Morgan?"

"No, I neber seed 'em; dey done left town two houahs ago on der hosses."

"How did you find out?"

"I hearn Cy Smiff tell dat der lawyeh Ha'is."

"Was he asking about them?"

"Yesum; he ax if they done gone, and den he seem mighty pleased-lak, 'n' go 'n' get on de cayes an g'way to Wichmun'."

"That will do; you have done everything right, Axem. You have proved that you are to be trusted, and hereafter you may go once every week for the mail. Now go, and Hagar will give you some supper," said her mistress kindly.

When the two friends were alone they looked at each other.

"I thought that Mr. Thorne might write, if only a few words," said Margaret, speaking for the first time of what had been in her mind, "since he went away as he did, and after what occurred this morning; but he has gone, it seems, and we are left without any explanation. It does look strange; I wish I knew what it meant;" and there was not the courage in her voice that her friend was accustomed to hear.

"I wouldn't bother about it, my dear girl; you can trust him to make it all plain when we see him. There's some good reason for it; I am mighty sure of that," declared Miss Rebecca with more than her usual positiveness. "Besides, you are not doing right in thinking all about yourself. Don't you suppose he is just as uneasy as you are? For he don't know whether you got your papers or not. Now, didn't you ask him what to do, and didn't he tell you, and promise to see that your business was set right for you? Did he not promise that the day you both came up to my room and talked it over —the day you read your cousin's letter?"

"Yes, Rebecca, he did."

"Well, he is a man that will keep his promise, never fear;" and Miss Price ceased talking, as though there was nothing more to be said on the subject.

In the gathering dusk Axem had come round to the veranda with her inseparable companion, Rolfe. Margaret called him to her, and he came with long, joyous bounds, thrusting his head in her lap with an air of such perfect happiness that she was comforted. Strangely enough, he persisted in making her his unmistakable favorite, in spite of all the petting lavished on him by others. It was only when she bade him go for his evening play that he joined Axem, and chased through the yard with her until, wearied, she dropped on the grass, refusing all his challenges to get up again. Suddenly he stood still, and raising his head seemed to listen intently. He stood so for several moments, with limbs rigid and ears pointing forward. Then with a bound he was over the stone wall, and was running swift as the wind down toward the bluffs.

"Rolfe, Rolfe, come back," Margaret called; but if her voice reached him he did not heed it, but bounded on till he was lost in the darkness.

"Oh, missus!" screamed Axem, "he done gone wun off;" and dropping down on the ground she sobbed and moaned aloud, rocking her body back and forth in uncontrollable grief, while Miss Rebecca was blaming herself for having loosed him at that time in the evening.

"I don't believe he will leave us," said Margaret. "He is a stranger in the neighborhood, and would

not know where to go. I feel sure he will come back."

She went down the path to the gate, and stood looking off through the gloaming, in the direction he had disappeared. Was she going to lose this friend too? The tears were very near the surface, when a sound, faint but regular, was borne to her ear on the still air. She inclined her head and listened; then she heard plainly the hoof-beats of a horse. Nearer and nearer they came, in a long swinging gallop, until she could discern a horseman coming out of the darkness, and a dog wild with delight was running now in wide circles, now pressing close to the side of the horse. Yes, it was Rolfe, for he had left the horseman and was bounding toward her. A great wave of thankfulness swept into her heart at the discovery. But who was the horseman? Could it be Mr. Thorne?

She stepped through the gate, and in a moment more he had drawn rein beside her and swung himself off his horse.

"Good-evening," he said cordially, coming up to her.

She gave him her hand, while she was saying a little nervously, but in tones of genuine relief and gladness, "It is you. It was you that Rolfe went to meet, and we thought he was running away."

"He would not desert you long, even for me," he said.

He did not hold Margaret's hand a moment too long, but every impulse of his being reached out toward her.

"How could Rolfe know you so far off?" she

asked. "And how did you get here? We thought you had gone, and—"

"And you were awfully doubting," he said, laughing lightly, which was the last thing he felt like doing; but it helped her to gain her composure. He had heard the little strained catch in her voice, and knew that the tears had not been far off.

"I did not doubt you; don't think that. I was only worried because—because there did not seem to be any way—"

"I know; there didn't seem to be any way for me to keep my promise to you," he said cheerfully.

"Yes, that was it."

"Did you not know that I would make a way, and that if I showed a careless indifference when I left, it was because I could best serve you by feigning disinterestedness in your affairs?" But despite the bravery of his words, there was to Margaret a sound of sadness, of discouragement, in his voice.

"I know now," she answered penitently, "that you have put it forever out of my power to doubt your sincerity or ability to keep a promise. And I never will again," she added earnestly.

"Will you promise me just that?"

"Yes, I promise. I ought, you know," she said conscientiously.

"That will do. I know you will not forget;" and there was a lighter-hearted sound in his voice.

"Shall I cross my heart?" and she laughed her soft joyous laugh. She was herself again.

Gabriel came to walk the horse about, for he was warm; and Thorne and Margaret went to where Miss Price waited for them on the veranda.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Thorne," she said, coming forward and offering her hand—"glad you came back."

"Yes?" Thorne always said it with a slight lengthening of the word, and the faintest rising inflection on the last letter which made it seem half an answer, half a query. "I came back on purpose to restore your faith in mankind, Miss Price; I couldn't bear the thought of your defection," he said smiling.

"I haven't lost my faith in mankind, nor in you either," she replied.

"I have heard of faith mountain high," he said, "and if there is such a thing I believe you have it, my friend."

"Perhaps I have, in some people and in some things."

They were sitting round the old library table.

"Did you get your papers, Miss Steyne?" was Thorne's first question.

"I did indeed," she replied, "and they are at this moment safely locked in the secretary;" and she rose to bring them.

"That is good news," he said heartily. "I have been doubly anxious about those papers to-day."

"Yes, she got them; but I reckon it took some good management," said Miss Price, "with you two walking up the hill in plain sight, and him taking so much time to get them out of his pocket, till I couldn't sit still on my chair," she declared.

Margaret laid the papers on the table. "If you will excuse me a few minutes I will get the other papers from my room;" and she went out.

It was then that Thorne heard the particulars of Margaret's morning with Harris, and how it was with not a second to spare that she got the papers into her hands as he and Mr. Morgan came through the gate.

"And," said Miss Price compassionately, "she has had a hard day all through, and I am glad you came back to-night."

"So am I," he said.

There was a sound of repressed feeling in his voice which caused Miss Price to give him a piercing look over her glasses; but thinking she had been mistaken, she put the thought aside.

Margaret now came in with the brass-bound box. This she set down on the table, and taking a key from her pocket, she unlocked it. At sight of the box in her hands there came to Mr. Thorne the recollections of the first time he had seen it; the day she stood in the wide hall with it clasped to her bosom, with the startled, mystified look in her brown eyes, and the delicate color coming and going on her sweet face. These memories, as they rushed over him now, were freighted with as much pain as joy. He put his hand up to his face; the light shone strong against his eyes, and it was a natural movement.

"There is an old maxim," he said, "which says, 'Business before pleasure.' It is a good one to follow. Let us give our attention to these papers, and when we have disposed of them, we will talk of a matter of interest to us all. There is something I wish to tell you."

For the space of a half hour there went on a rapid

examination and comparison of accounts and papers, until a satisfactory result was reached.

"It is better than I feared it might be," said Thorne. "Your lawyer has been fairly honest as money matters go. The railroad securities and bank-stock have not been transferred to you, which is a careless piece of business, putting it mildly. Get that done; it can soon be effected; then you may control the situation and discharge your lawyer."

"Thank goodness for that!" exclaimed Miss Price decidedly

"You observe by the receipts which your cousin left that he has been paid, according to contract, a certain sum yearly. Once this stock is transferred you will be in a position to be as independent as you could wish. A sworn statement will be necessary, and I will send old Squire Cranston over to-morrow to see you."

Then two letters were rapidly dictated to the two Northern firms, which were to be sent with the other papers on the morrow.

"I feel that a burden has fallen from my heart," said Margaret; "I am so glad that I can be free."

"Yes; the statement of his accounts which your cousin so carefully prepared and left for you, practically frees you of that man, and I am heartily glad for you and with you. You are to be congratulated," said Thorne warmly. "I say this emphatically, because I know more of your Lawyer Harris now than I did before I saw him this morning."

"You have known him before, and were surprised to see him?" said Margaret.

"Yes, I knew him formerly; not so well by association as by report. His name is not John C. Harris, but Caleb J. Harvey."

Margaret looked at the speaker in astonishment.

"I want to know! I want to know!" exclaimed Miss Price, dropping excitedly into the quaint New England dialect.

"It is indeed true. I knew him many years ago in New Orleans. That was his home and where his family lived, where they now live, all that are left of them."

"Is this possible?" exclaimed Margaret.

"Yes, it is true without a shadow of doubt.

"He was not a lawyer then, only a young fellow about town, whose sole occupation seemed to be the dissipations of a fashionable man. What caused him to change his name I cannot say. His father was in very moderate circumstances, though of good family, and it was a matter of speculation to some how young Harvey could afford to lead the idle life he did. He dressed well, and had a certain air about him which women found fascinating. He assiduously cultivated the friendship of people of wealth and distinction. I have heard him called by those who knew him well, a toady and time-server. But he prospered according to his desires, and became engaged to a young lady of wealth and beauty, an heiress in her own right, a ward of my uncle's. As soon as the engagement was announced, Harvey became very impatient for a speedy marriage, though his affianced was much

younger than himself. To please him, an early day for the wedding had been set, when a tragedy occurred in his family which shocked the whole city, and caused a sudden cessation in the preparations. His only sister, a beautiful young girl, was murdered. And theirs were not the only hearts made sorrowful; the murdered girl was the affianced wife of your cousin Henry."

"Oh, how terrible!" cried Margaret. "My poor cousin! No wonder he was so sad! How was she murdered, and who did it?" she asked in a low, shuddering voice, involuntarily drawing nearer to her companions.

"She was shot down by the hand of an assassin, as she stood by your cousin's side, in the dusk of evening, on her father's veranda. Who did it? That was never known. Many theories were advanced, but the assassin was not found, and the murder remains a mystery to this day."

"And that was the sorrow that ruined my cousin's life?"

"Yes; I believe you may truly say it did," Thorne answered. "I was abroad at the time, completing my college course, and did not return for more than two years afterward. As it was told to me then, Henry Steyne was so greatly shocked that in a few hours after the tragedy occurred he was raving in the delirium of fever. In his ravings he talked of a face in the shrubbery, but through his being so ill no clue could be obtained. It was not thought he would recover, and the impression gained strength that a former mistress whom he had discarded had through jealousy shot his be-

trothed to prevent his marriage. But after his recovery public opinion, shuttlecock-like, drifted again, and Henry Steyne was acquitted of the slightest responsibility for her death. For as soon as he was able to rise from a sick bed, he employed the best detectives to be had and set to work to find the murderer, but all clue seemed to have been lost while he was ill and unable to move in the matter. It was said, too, by some, that the family of Miss Harvey exhibited a strange apathy in the matter of searching for the murderer, but no strength was attached to the allegation by the best class of people, and soon after they were discussing a new chapter in the drama. The heiress to whom Caleb Harvey was engaged severed the engagement, as the world understood it ; but it was my uncle, as he long afterward confessed to me, who broke it off and forbade Harvey the house, firmly refusing to give to anyone, except Harvey, his reasons for doing so. I do not know them to this day. But what was more mysterious still and unaccounted for was the fact that, immediately after the severing of the engagement, Caleb Harvey, with your cousin, quietly left New Orleans and never returned. About three years later the New Orleans papers published a notice of Caleb Harvey's death ; he had died of a fever in a Northern city. I was never so astonished in my life as when I walked in on him this morning and found that your Lawyer Harris, the trusted friend of Henry Steyne, was Caleb Harvey, who had been counted dead all these years ; and I do not think the surprise was all on my side," he added as he recalled the lawyer's pallid face.

"He was not only surprised, but thoroughly frightened as well," said Margaret; "that was plain. But what astonished me more, if possible, was the way you both recovered yourselves. How could you do it and ignore everything so entirely when you knew what you did?"

"It was the thought of how much trouble and annoyance he might give you, should I unmask him or expose him, that enabled me to be so self-controlled and, yes, politic," he said with a half-grimace. "I was more desperately anxious than ever to get you free of him in every way; and the best thing I could do for you after the break I had made, was to feign the slightest acquaintance with you or interest in your affairs, and get away before he did."

"You succeeded mighty well in your feigning," observed Miss Price.

"Yes?" said Thorne, with that half-interrogative inflection which made the word as he said it seem half a caress. "Do you mean with my friends as well?"

Margaret smilingly shook her head. "It was the wisest thing you could have done all round. I only wonder that you could do it. It takes so much out of one."

"You are right, and of the best part of us. I do not often deal in subterfuge, but one has to meet people of that stamp with their own weapons. But, for to-day's deceits I hold myself justified. I regard a man who does not stand under his own name as seamen do a ship at sea without a flag, entitled to little respect and scant quarter."

"A man must have a strong motive to induce him to change his name," remarked Miss Price.

"And conceal himself so persistently," said Margaret.

"And write his own obituary," added Thorne, "as he surely did. I am now satisfied there was something about that murder that would not bear investigation."

"And we shall never know anything more about it than we do," said Margaret sadly.

"I don't know about that," objected Miss Rebecca. "Such things don't stay hidden forever. It's my belief that it will be known sometime."

"It would seem," said Margaret, "that my cousin wished all knowledge of it to die out, or he would have communicated the truth about it to some one during his lifetime."

"He may have done so and we not know of it. But you are sure of one thing without question," said Thorne.

"And that is?"

"That is, that he did not want you to come into close relationship with Harvey, or Harris, as I suppose we would best continue to call him for the present, and urged you to annul all business relations with him, which of itself would tell you that for some reason he believed him capable of treachery to you."

"But you have not told us how you came here this evening," said Margaret. "You left Walsingham early."

"We took our horses and rode as far as the old Cranston place, where we stopped for the night.

After supper I left Morgan so that he might get acquainted with the Squire, his most important neighbor, as I told him, while I rode back here. How did you know that I had not come up from Walsingham?" Thorne asked.

"I knew," she began, and there was just the slightest hesitancy in her manner; then she went resolutely on—"I knew, because I sent Axem down for the mail, and she heard Harris ask Cy Smith about you, and he said you had gone 'a right smart spell ago.'"

"Do you know there is no better authority than Smith, honest soul that he is?" said Thorne smiling.

"Then you think him to be relied upon in the important matter of disseminating news—just common everyday news?" she asked.

"I do. And he should have been postmaster a century ago, when the gathering and circulation of news was a part of a postmaster's official duties. His services would have been invaluable. He has a positive faculty for acquiring news, but what is more rare, he is accurate in retailing it, as I have come to know in my short acquaintance. When he relates a piece of news, you may depend on its being just as he heard it; there will be nothing added to or taken from it."

"I also learned that Lawyer Harris had left the village. Axem saw him take the train for Richmond. And that," continued Margaret, with animation, "has made me positively happy. I have been breathing rarefied air ever since."

At this moment Hagar appeared in the doorway

with the announcement that she had set tea in the dining-room.

"You have done this for me, and why should you?" Thorne was saying as he followed into the dining-room. Within, he was wondering why he never came to this house and left as he had planned to do. What fate was it that conspired to bring him here and labored to prevent his going away?

"I think we have all merited a cup of tea," said Margaret, as she settled down in the high-backed chair at the head of the table, a chair dark with age and rich in carving, a picture in itself.

"It has been a long day; measured by events and emotions, the longest of my life," she continued. "For almost every emotion that the human heart can experience I have experienced to-day, unless it be remorse for the hypocrisy which I practised and repented of dually as I went along. My suffering on account of it was tangible and real. Is not that expiation?" she asked, looking across the table at the two who might be her judges, with just a faint appeal in her voice and eyes, despite her bravery.

"You are guiltless," declared Thorne; "guiltless of anything calling for expiation, repentance, or regret. On the contrary, there are many things in the events of this day over which you should rejoice and make merry even."

"Oh! but I have had my dash of comedy as well," exclaimed Margaret, looking across at Miss Price, who was feeling a little apprehensive over the turn the conversation had taken.

"Indeed!" and Thorne's eyes lighted. "I had

not suspected it, and am just in the mood to be amused ; enlighten me, won't you ? "

" Yes, I think I may ; at least I may tell you that Axem has risen to the height of a genius to-day, a possibility never before suspected ; and in doing so she has made Rebecca her sincere friend and admirer. Ask her if it is not so."

Then followed a merry account of the amusing interview between the lawyer and Axem, in which Miss Rebecca's mythical lover had been made to play so important a part.

" Well, it does seem strange how her lying came in so providentially."

" Providentially ! Oh, Rebecca ! " exclaimed Margaret.

" There's nothing wrong with your orthodoxy, Miss Price," assured Thorne. " Axem lied by inspiration—not divine inspiration, but do you not believe that, being in such close proximity to her at the time, and thinking so intently on the matter, and your mind being so much stronger than hers, you unintentionally and unknown to her or yourself, transmitted to her mind the bent it took in the matter ? The impulse was yours ; you wished her to deceive the man, and she did it. The words were her own ; she called upon her imagination for them, and it did not fail her."

" I should say it didn't," declared Miss Price stoutly. " But what kind of new heathenish doctrine is it you are talking now, about a stronger mind controlling a weaker without so much as a word being spoken ? Why, I couldn't see her where I stood."

"It is far from being a new doctrine or belief, or altogether a heathenish one," replied Thorne. "It existed centuries ago ; has always existed and been practiced."

"And what do you call it?" asked Miss Price, looking over her glasses with critical eye.

"It has been known by many different names. I will call it a mesmeric or magnetic influence, hypnotism if you like, with which, if you possess it, you may compel one who is not so forceful, not so strong in that element, to do what you will them to do. The victim is not responsible for his or her acts."

"My goodness! what are you talking about?" exclaimed Miss Price, protest in every angle of her body, as well as in her voice. "You can't make me think I am responsible for all those lies Axem told. If I thought that for a minute I'd go right to repenting."

"Rebecca objects to having a lover and an hypnotic power thrust upon her in one day," said Margaret, still in a merry mood.

"I reckon I should object to two such bothersome things. I don't go about seeking trouble if I know it. Did I understand you to say that Mr. Morgan had a family?" asked Miss Price, changing the subject with a sudden desperate courage that was almost too much for her companions.

But with fitting equanimity Thorne replied :

"Only his wife and an aunt of his, who kept house for him before he was married ; she still makes her home with them. I shall be surprised if you ladies do not like Mrs. Morgan. I have met

her a number of times at her home, and feel sure you will find her a desirable neighbor."

"That will be pleasant," said Margaret, a cordial welcome to the new neighbors showing already in her lovely face. "We need just the addition of congenial neighbors to make us quite comfortable up here. When will they likely come?"

"It is Morgan's intention to begin building and have his house habitable at as early a date as is possible. We have decided to open the mine on your land as soon as it can be done."

"Have you purchased any other land in the neighborhood?" asked Miss Price.

"But one tract certainly, and that Squire Cranston's. I think it probable, however, that we will obtain all immediately adjoining it. I am waiting the result of some investigation before deciding."

The old timepiece chimed out eleven o'clock as they left the table.

"I must be going. Morgan will think I have gone for good."

"I am sorry to have caused you this late ride," said Margaret.

"You would not say that if you knew how much I enjoy a ride under the stars. It is the poetry of my outdoor life, and King enjoys it with me. My regret is that I shall not see you again. I have spent many enjoyable hours in your beautiful home, hours which I shall always remember with pleasure. It is because I do not expect to see you for some time that I am going to ask a favor of you. I want both you ladies to write me a letter. I shall not feel easy till I know if you have your business all

satisfactorily arranged, and are forever done with Lawyer Harris." And they promised.

He shook hands with Miss Price. "I feel that I am leaving behind a friend who will remember me kindly," he said.

"I shall always remember you kindly, Mr. Thorne, and I do wish you well," she said with simple sincerity.

Turning to Margaret he said: "Our acquaintance has been short, Miss Steyne; our paths in life seem to diverge here to-night; they may not cross again, and I am reluctant to say good-bye. Owing to the business circumstances attending our acquaintance, I am come to know something of the difficulties and hardships of your position. The worst may be over; I pray it is. But we cannot know, and I want to leave you with this promise of continued friendship betweeen us: if at any time in your life you should need a friend, I want to feel that you will call on me."

"But, Mr. Thorne, would that be right?" said Margaret. "You have already done so much for me that I can never repay."

"And so little," he said smiling. "You may never need my aid or advice in any way, Miss Steyne; there is a chance for you, a wide chance," he said lightly. After a moment of silence, he went on in that quiet, effective way, which men having that subtle overmastering power which brooks no gainsaying always possess: "I ask this because we cannot know what the future has in store for us. Life is a game. You have neither father nor brothers, not a male relative, you have

told me. You cannot know how unprotected you seem to me—how unprotected a woman in your position must seem to a man. I shall feel happier if you will consent to what I ask, and I think you will when you have thought of it."

He was cool and controlled. Never had Margaret seen or felt more clearly that fine sense of mastery and power in the man, that power which belongs only to the thoroughly manly man, than she did when he stood there asking for the privilege of interposing his strength between her and harm, if harm menaced her, and she knew that he would get her promise, even while she hesitated against his insistence.

Thorne saw, as did Miss Price, that she hesitated, but he could wait. He meant to get his way in the end. He was not selfish in this, he told himself; it was for her sake, and he thought he was honest.

"It is for her happiness I asked her," he said to his heart—"for her happiness, and—for my salvation."

Down with a crash went the barriers of deception which he had but builded against his love for her. He was honest now, in these last moments when he was speaking his last words to her—the last; they had to be that. He knew now that a battle which could end only with his life was to be fought. And the blood beat along his veins to suffocation, while the cool air, stealing through the open window, fanned his temples with a touch as gentle as that of a woman who loves.

"It seems almost a solemn thing to promise,"

said Margaret slowly—"and hardly generous of me to do it."

"Don't take that view of it," he said quietly, without looking at her.

"But if kept in good faith, it might entail hardship, even sacrifice on you, which I have no right to impose; and I should feel that I must keep it always, under any and all circumstances."

"No, there is one condition," he said. "If I should ever prove unworthy your friendship you are released from all promises to me." There was just the slight, proud lift of the head, the unconscious straightening of the shoulders, that betokens a conscious strength within.

"I am not afraid," she answered quickly. "I am quite certain. Leave that condition out. I promise, if you will consider yourself bound by the same conditions, for it is as you say; life is a game at which we all are playing blindly."

"Most gladly I promise, and with no terms of release. Miss Price is our witness. It is unconditional surrender, absolute capitulation on my part," he said lightly, as he took her small, soft palm in his strong clasp.

Thorne's heart was exultant, but he only said:

"I thank you, my friend. Good-bye."

And he was gone down the walk with quick, resolute step.

"Returned to the darkness out of which he came," said Miss Price, verging ludicrously near the sentimental for her.

They did not at once enter the house, but remained on the veranda enjoying the still restfulness of the

night, which sooner than aught else soothes the excited brain. The sound of his horse's feet had grown faint and died away before the heavy bar was dropped into its hasp across the hall door.

As they passed through the hall, some object caught on the hem of Margaret's gown. She freed her skirt from it, and picked it up. It was a spur which Thorne must have loosed from his boot when he came in, and forgotten. She stood with it in her hand a moment, then crossed into the library and locked it in her secretary.

XVII.

THE LAWYER'S PROPOSAL.

"What smiles and welcomes would I give,
Some friend to see each day I live;
And yet, what treasures would I pay
If some would always stay away."

NOT many days elapsed before Lawyer Harris was again seen wending his way up the hill. Taking into account the extreme nicety of his toilet on this occasion, the satisfied expression of his countenance, and his assured walk, you would have said it was an important mission upon which he was bound.

He felt it to be the most tantalizingly interesting period of his life. He was to take the first step in that future life which he had so confidently planned out for himself; he was to propose marriage to the fair mistress of Steyne House. He had not informed her of his coming; he wanted to arrive unheralded, that he might see the sweet surprise in her eyes when she beheld him.

This courtship was to be the romance of the new life upon which he was entering—the life that was to give such complete satisfaction, such unalloyed happiness. No doubt of failure or disaster troubled him. Had he not for twenty years controlled and shaped events? he asked in his egotism. And had not life yielded him what he demanded? After all

his long training was he less able now to mould his future, to wrest happiness from a stubborn world? No, he was stronger to-day than he had ever been, and in deadly earnest. A furry brown rabbit, cuddling in a bunch of grass at the side of the road, was startled and sprang up and across his path. He stood watching it as it scurried away, and into his mind came an old saw, or couplet, which the colored people repeat and believe unquestioningly :

> "The lover whose track the rabbit shall cross,
> Must turn back home or meet a loss."

He looked after it a moment, then, smiling, walked on to his destiny. An hour later Caleb Harvey thought of the rabbit that had crossed his path, thought of it as he stood before Margaret Steyne, her rejected suitor, wounded, baffled, humiliated, with a great fury blazing from his eyes and a deadly anger raging in his heart. His voice was controlled and even, but with an effort that was terrible to see; and the frail girl shuddered at the demoniac passions she had innocently waked but could not allay.

"You have refused me," he said. "You have said you do not love me; you have given that as your reason for rejecting me. Well, I do not believe you. You will not give me a chance to win you. You have not told me all the truth. Will you tell me the rest?"

"What do you wish to know?" Margaret spoke low and softly, but her eyes met his unflinchingly. She felt as she had felt the morning that Harris and Thorne had faced each other in almost the same

spot. Her courage rose within her now, as it had then. She could answer him as he deserved ; she had not meant to speak so plainly to him, had not thought that she would be compelled to justify her actions.

"What I want to know is, why you reject me? Is there another man ahead of me? Are you promised?" The muscles of his mouth were not quite controlled as he asked this.

"No, I am not promised to any man. There is no one ahead of you." And strange to say, with all his suspicious nature, he believed her. "Although you do not deserve that I should answer your question," she went on, "no man has come between us in that way."

The lawyer scarcely breathed while she was speaking, and did not move—only gazed at her steadily, as though he would draw her inmost thoughts from her by the impelling force of his strong will, by his eyes, which almost scorched her by their intensity. At last he spoke.

"Some one then has come between us in some way ; and, by heaven! I know who it is," he exclaimed hotly, white with passion ; it is that cursed scoundrel I met here. He it is and no one else who has lied to you, has vilified me to you. It's just like him to do it. Curse him! He will never escape my vengeance now. I will ruin him, if I devote the rest of my life to it ; it shall be my work, and work well done."

Margaret's heart quaked ; her courage almost failed before his passionate words, but she would not let him know.

"You doubtless know more of the gentleman than I, or you know but little," she said quietly; "yet you are talking wildly. I will set you right if you will suspend judgment until I get a letter."

So saying, Margaret left the room. She was gone but a few moments, yet the lawyer found it long enough to step to the secretary, and with a rapid, cat-like movement, insert a key, open it, and make a quick search for the papers which he had seen her place there but a few days before. He did not find them; they were gone, and he swore a savage oath. But Miss Steyne's returning footsteps warned him that he was in peril of discovery, and he had barely time to lock the secretary and regain his former position. The keys jingled faintly upon the ring as he removed them from the lock. The red lip of Margaret Steyne curled in scorn of the cowardly act, for she had recognized the sound, and knew that only accident had saved her from being robbed, the accident of having removed her papers to her private room. She walked up to him with the open letter in her hand.

"Here is a letter which my cousin Henry left for me. It did not reach me for some time after I came here; but that it did reach me I shall be forever thankful. I cannot be too grateful to him," she said warmly.

As Margaret spoke there came a change over the lawyer's face. His color came and went in quick, flickering changes as his eyes fell on the paper, for he knew that Henry Steyne had written this letter, and the words blurred before his eyes.

"I wish you to read the entire letter," she said,

"and tell me, if you can, what claim you have upon my respect and forbearance?"

Harris winced at her words as if he had received a blow, and, despite his heroic self-command, the blood mounted to his forehead in a fierce hot wave of crimson, and his eyes dropped to the floor.

He received the letter from her hand. He did not want to read it; he wanted instead to tear it to atoms and fling it to the winds. He could hardly resist the impulse, but he must read it and know what it contained; must know what charge he had to controvert; and, forced against his will, he dropped into a chair and read it through. As he read his face cleared and regained its usual color. When he had finished, he could have laughed aloud in his relief. There was so little in it, so pitifully little in it, it seemed to him, when he had feared everything, when there might have been so much, even the one secret which he now felt was still safely hidden within his own breast; it had been so well guarded that no one guessed there was anything to guard.

All that this letter contained might easily be the ravings and imaginings of a man of weak intellect —and was. Who knew that Henry Steyne had been in his right mind for the past years? Who but himself knew anything about the matter? No one, he told himself with suddenly returning courage, and he determined to make the best defence he could from that vantage ground. He was clever enough to see that it was the only point he had, and he would make it serve him well.

"And you choose," he said, with an injured air,

"to believe the childish prattle of a man who for years was not responsible for what he might say or do, because he was your cousin, and for no other reason. Believe all his accusations—no, not accusations, but mere insane imaginings—and wrong me. You cannot be so unjust," he urged. "You will not."

The effrontery of the man helped Margaret to the courage she needed.

"I choose," she said firmly, "to believe in my cousin's sanity and good judgment. If this letter were not enough I have other papers which leave no room for doubt. I believe so truly that he gave me good advice in this letter, that I have acted upon it. His accounts and papers were kept with such care and precision, and his written directions to me were so clear, that I have been able to master all the important details of my affairs, and can now relieve you of all further trouble about them. Your responsibility may cease from this hour. You are no longer my adviser or agent."

Had a thunderbolt riven its way through the roof and dropped at his feet, the lawyer would not have been more astonished. Her words stunned him. The veins stood out on his forehead in knots; his voice was husky and hard as points of broken steel.

"You!" he burst forth. "What do you know? You would not dare."

"What do I know? Is it of the business you are speaking?" she asked, with a look of dauntless courage. "If so, I know that you received a certain sum yearly for attending to my cousin's business, and that I hold your receipts to him for your salary,

paid up to the time of his death. I know also that the railroad stock securities and bank stock, which came to me as a part of my inheritance, have not been transferred to me, and further that the semi-annual dividends for the past two years have been drawn by you and have not been accounted for; but these you may retain as remuneration for service rendered. And I do dare discharge you." Her voice was ringing and decisive.

He made no reply. The silence was as that of death. Had the old clock ever ticked so loudly before, Margaret wondered. Had it ever timed the birth and flight of such passions as now tossed and swayed the heart of the strong man who stood before her, a prototype of all that was bitter and vengeful? A minute passed; it seemed an eternity. Then he came a step nearer and stood before her, cold, hard, unflinching as iron, and spoke in slow measured tones, every word of which was as a poisoned dagger in the heart of the sensitive woman. But she did not shrink. She had the blood of her soldier ancestors in her veins, blood as yet untried and unproved. It did not fail her now.

"You have obeyed your cousin's instructions in part," he said, "but you have not done a wise thing in making an enemy of me; you may be sorry in time that you have chosen to do so. That you have done all this alone, and because of your cousin's letter, I will never believe. Some man who knew what to do influenced and advised you to this step—yes, aided you. And that man was Thompson Thorne. I hate him with the bitterest hatred a man's heart can hold, and I curse him with the deepest curse

that man's tongue can utter. It is not the first time he has crossed my path, nor the first time he has thwarted my plans; and he will never forget that he has done so now. For this day's work I will take my revenge, now or years hence; it will never be too late. Remember."

With these words he left the house. Then Margaret did what she had never done before in her life, broke down utterly, and dropping into a seat, she covered her face with her hands and cried as if her heart were breaking.

Axem, hovering about the hall like a shadow, rushed into the room. One glance, and as an arrow from a bow she flew in search of Miss Price and the camphor bottle. But faithful Rebecca, when she saw what was the matter, dropped the bottle, and putting her strong arms around the sobbing girl drew her head down on to her shoulder.

"Just cry away, dear child; you'll be all the better of it;" and there were tears in the blue-gray eyes that had not been there for years.

But Axem, when she saw no improvement in the mistress she almost worshipped, could endure the strain in silence no longer, and she rushed into the hall, threw herself down full-length, and pounded her head on the floor, howling in sympathy with such vigor as to bring Hagar upon the scene. Hagar, finding that nothing serious had occurred, seized Axem and bore her off to the kitchen, where with a stern hand she deposited her under the kitchen table, with "Hish dat fuss up."

Margaret, between tears and laughter at the ludicrous spectacle, made a struggle and sat up.

"What a goose I am! Why don't you scold me, Rebecca?" She smiled, while the eyes were still bright with tears.

"Because I don't want to scold you; and I don't want you to talk about anything till you have had your dinner and rested. Then you may tell me just what you wish."

"What should I do without you, you loving old soul? You are always the same indulgent friend, whether I am unreasonable or not."

"Unreasonable isn't the word. Do you suppose I would like you as well as I do if you didn't have any feelings? It's best to cry when you feel bad, and if I was young again I'd learn how; yes, I would."

Margaret smiled wearily and closed her eyes. She looked pale as her head nestled against the dark red cover of the high chair, and there was a little pathetic droop at the corners of her mouth like that of a grieved child.

Miss Price, as she looked at her, felt herself growing savage with the whole race of men. "They are such brutes!" she exclaimed inaudibly. But almost in the same breath she faced about on herself, and throttling with no weak hand the demon of suspicion and injustice which for a moment had taken possession of her heart, proceeded to give herself a mental dressing-down.

"What are you coming to, Rebecca Price, I wonder? At your time of life to be saying there are no good men in the world, when you know better; when you know that every day and hour in this great world grand men are to be found who are giving the best of their lives for the bettering and up-

lifting of mankind; not only the best of their lives, but oftentimes life itself! I am ashamed of you."

She looked across at Margaret with a yearning glance. The heart of the austere, lonely old maid had grown soft and tender through her love for her young friend. What her own life would have been without this love and companionship she could not bear to think. She shrank from the memories of the old life. It had been so barren and dreary, barren of love and joyous companionship, dreary in the dead commonplace of the monotonous round of everyday duties performed just because they were her duties, with no hope in them, with no delight. It had all been so different since she had found Margaret; she was happier than she had ever been in her life before, and her content was measureless. She was ready now to have any trial come to her; willing to interpose her strength and years at all times and at any sacrifice, if sacrifice were necessary, so that Margaret might be spared sorrow and be made happy.

The dinner bell rang. The white lids stirred and opened, then drooped again; but Margaret made no effort to rouse herself, and was drifting off into a languid stupor, when Rebecca's brisk tones brought her back to herself.

"Come and have a cup of coffee, Margaret; after that you may rest."

"I am so tired," Margaret responded, rousing herself with an effort. "I believe I could sit as I am without moving all day; it is such a pleasure merely to be still."

"But I would not do it," said Miss Rebecca, looking anxiously over her glasses at her and getting to her feet. "You had better come to the table. I shall not enjoy my dinner if you do not."

Margaret was at once aroused, and pulling herself up from her chair followed into the dining-room.

Miss Rebecca hastened to wait on her with quiet solicitude while she drank her coffee, and when she saw that under its effect Margaret brightened and threw off her languor, she immediately recovered her cheerfulness and chatted away with what was loquaciousness in her, talking on any and every topic that was as remote as possible from the occurrence of the morning.

When they returned to the library door and were about to enter, Margaret hesitated on the threshold and finally turned back saying, "Let us not sit here. I do not like this room to-day ; we will go up to my room. Would you mind bringing your work there? Then we can talk, and I shall like that."

When, after a few minutes spent in her own room, Miss Price returned, she found Margaret lying on the lounge. Her eyes were closed and her face wore the same look it had worn down in the library. Miss Rebecca sat down and quietly watched her. Margaret did not stir, and soon her breathing became regular, and the worried, grieved look faded out of her face, and she slept heavy and dreamless through the afternoon.

Miss Rebecca, satisfied that a good, restful sleep was the best medicine, took up her knitting, and with it took up again the wonder as to what Law-

yer Harris or Harvey could have said to Margaret to prostrate her so completely. That he had asked her to marry him she felt sure, but he must have said hard, cruel things to her.

"Now, if he could only have proposed to me, how I would have enjoyed telling him what I thought of him!" and the unimaginative, practical Miss Price turned curiously over in her mind various grim expedients that might have been useful in case of a determined and persistent declaration of love.

In such speculations she found a certain amusement and occupation which served to fill the hours of the afternoon while Margaret slept; but when the rays of the sun slanted low against the window, and the shadows doubled their length, then Miss Price began to cast anxious looks at the sleeping girl. She rose and laid her hand on Margaret's wrist, the soft, white, rounded wrist from which the full lace-trimmed sleeve fell back. There was no fever, though the pulse was not strong nor quite regular, and with a troubled face she went back to her seat, to the hardest of all tasks—waiting. But the waiting this time was, happily, of short duration, for almost immediately Margaret opened her eyes and looked at the clock.

"Why did you not wake me?" she asked.

"No need to do that; you wanted the rest, I reckon, or you would not have slept. But now that you are awake, if you will come right down, I will go and see that our tea is made ready for us."

And Miss Rebecca descended to the kitchen, with a face so cheerful and content that Hagar was moved to speak of it.

"I d'clar! Miss Becky, ye mus' done hab a vision or sumpin', ye look so chippersome."

Miss Rebecca's only reply was a smile.

No, she was not sick; there was nothing whatever the matter with her; she was just tired, Margaret would answer to all her inquiries; the heat had been so constant of late.

It was in the quiet evening, as twilight fell, when the birds were quiet in the woods, and the katydids cried monotonously in the old Virginia creeper, that Margaret told Rebecca of the lawyer's proposal, and of his blind, passionate anger at her refusal, his assertions that Mr. Thorne was to blame for it, and that he had advised her about her business, not even Henry Steyne's letter serving to abate one jot of his belief.

"And he dared to be angry with you! What did he say?" almost demanded Miss Price, her shoulders bristling at a combative angle.

"Oh! he was hard and terrible in his anger. I could not tell you how hard; he was cruel, cruel." And Margaret shuddered as she again saw him with that still, deathlike passion in his face, and heard again his deep curses and vows of vengeance.

"And you did not tell him that you knew his name was not Harris?—that he had given out that he was dead, and that he was living now under an assumed name? You did not tell him that?" exclaimed Rebecca, furious at his ruffianly treatment of Margaret.

"Oh, I did not dare, for Mr. Thorne's sake. He would have known then that Mr. Thorne told us. All I could do I did. I tried to have him think it

was cousin Henry's letter alone that influenced me. I could not bring Mr. Thorne into the trouble. He has been so kind to us."

"If your cousin had done as he should have done, told you all about that man's past life, you could have talked to him as you pleased, and he would not have dared to use you as he did, threatening you. It makes my blood boil," declared Rebecca Price; and her mouth settled into a determined curve that would have meant battle royal had it been her fortune to meet Harris.

"Rebecca, do not blame my cousin," pleaded Margaret. "When I think of the life he must have led with that man, of the years of forced companionship—rather espionage—which he endured, I pity him with the deepest pity my heart can feel. I am only afraid that Harris will injure Mr. Thorne in some way; it is too bad that he should go get into trouble through helping me. What can I do?"

"If you really believe that Harris means harm, you can let him know about it, so he can watch out for him. It's sure to be some underhand work, when he does move, and you had best tell Mr. Thorne at once."

"Why not?" asked Miss Price, as Margaret shook her head negatively.

"How can I? I will not tell him that Harris proposed marriage to me. I hope no one will ever know that. And my business is not all settled yet, and may not be for a little time. I see no way to write now, but as soon as my affairs are arranged I shall keep my promise and write him a letter, in which I will try to warn him in a way that he may

believe it is on account of business matters alone that we have incurred Harris's anger and suspicion. I feel tired still," she added lazily. "I believe I will go up to my room, though it is early."

"Yes, do; it will be best for you, and in the morning you will feel a different person," comforted Miss Rebecca; and vowing to herself that she would not take her stockings off that night, she locked the door and followed upstairs.

Rebecca Price had "made up her mind," and her shoulders were just a trifle more angular, her back more severely straight and resolute. She was going to watch Margaret's slumbers through the night, not yet able to banish the fear that the languor and prostration which had overtaken her might be the forerunner of a spell of sickness, brought on by the excitement of the morning. But there was something else on her mind. She had made another resolve she meant to carry out, which required time and labor to accomplish, and it was hours before the light went out in her room. It was not until the gray light appeared in the east, and day began to break that she ceased her stolen visits to that other bedside, and sought her own with a lightened spirit and a thankful heart, for Margaret slept the sleep of utter prostration, and did not stir.

The air had cooled through the night, and the morning was sweet with the breath of the dew when Margaret Steyne came down. She felt the freshness in her eyes as she stood at the open window of the dining-room. She was pale, and her eyes were tired, with heavy, dark circles about them. But the night's rest had done wonders for

her, she was assuring her friend, and she seemed so like her old self in spirit that Miss Price folded away her fears in the folds of her napkin, and said as she rose from the breakfast table :

"I believe I will go down to Walsingham this morning, Margaret. There is some buying to do which should be done to-day."

"Then be sure to start early, that you may be back before the heat comes on," urged Margaret. "I shall look about for a safe horse to drive, that we may not have to walk, and can go together when we wish."

She stood on the veranda and watched them off, Miss Price and Axem, between whom there had come a most amicable understanding. Miss Rebecca had found out that the little black girl was quick-witted and loyal, and that, notwithstanding all her impishness, she was to be trusted implicitly where her mistress was concerned ; and *that*, to Rebecca, was the sum total of the requirements expected of Axem.

Margaret went off to the kennel to unchain Rolfe for the day. They would soon leave off chaining him altogether, for he had grown accustomed to the ways of the place, and to know the people who came there in a neighborly way. She looked across at the wood in its fresh green beauty. Should she go for a walk or return to the house? But the dew was heavy on the grass, and she went back resolving to go later.

In the library she drew up a chair in front of the secretary and opened it. Her eyes fell at once on the spur, which lay just where she had placed it, in

plain sight, the first object one must see on opening the secretary. In a flash she remembered that Lawyer Harris had searched the secretary. He must have seen the spur and guessed to whom it belonged, and had given the accident an import in keeping with his suspicious nature. Things were growing clearer to her now. She sat thinking over the events of the past few weeks. How they had crowded into her life, each lapping fast upon the one before like waves on the seashore ; yet, unlike the sea waves, the last did not obliterate the imprint of the one before it. Each would leave its distinct impress upon her life, where it must forever remain.

Hagar passed through the hall, and her mistress spoke to her.

"I am going up to the secret room, Hagar, and do not wish to be disturbed. Do you understand?"

"'Deed I doz, honey. You jes' lock the lib'ry doah aftah me now, an' nobody'll cum nigh ye."

Margaret locked the door, picked up the spur, and passed through the closet by the fireplace and up the narrow, padded stair, which gave back no echo of her footsteps. She was following a sudden impulse in putting this spur where it would not again be seen by anyone save herself. She thought of the secret room with feelings of relief and gratitude that it was there, and that she alone had access to it. No one could pry and rummage there.

She took the key from the top of the casing, as Hagar had done, and unlocked the door. She went over to the window and threw it open. The sweet morning air came in with refreshing coolness, and

the white pigeons came and crooned on the sill in friendly fashion.

Margaret had not told Miss Price about this room. She felt about it as one feels when he knows there is a hidden chamber in his heart wherein is shrined some happy memory unknown and unguessed of by others. Hagar knew, yet it was to her but an empty, unmeaning room, and she was to be trusted. Margaret did not mean that anyone else should know now; she might feel different about it sometime; she did not know. We know so little how we shall feel to-morrow by what we feel to-day, but we are ruled by what we feel to-day. When she came up here she felt this. She was cut entirely off from the rest of the world, shut away from everything, from everyone. "Just my heart and I," she said.

This room had always been sacred to the masters of Steyne House, she had been told. She was the new owner, and she would keep to family tradition. She had a sentiment about it, too; she felt nearer to her father's people here in this room than anywhere else in the old home.

"This secret room is my one special legacy, my one hint of mystery," she said. "I cannot share it with anyone. It was in this room that I received the only message I have had from my cousin, the only word of kindly interest, which he, unhappy man, left me, and should I ever receive another communication from him, I feel that it will come to me here. If I had reason to think there might be one, I believe I should never stop searching until I found it;" and obeying a new impulse which came to her,

she got up and walked back and forth, scanning the brown rafters as she had not before. Across the floor she went, board by board, wondering and half laughing at herself as she did so. All was solid, tight, empty, and bare.

She went back to her chair by the table, smiling at her idle fancies.

"I must not let such a thought take possession of me as that there is a possibility of anything being hidden in this room; it would spoil my pleasure in coming here. And what do I want more than I have already received? Can I put it into words? Yes; I want to know something more about my people, but, most of all, I want to know about my cousin Henry, as the last of my relatives. I want to know all the cruel mystery of his life. I want to know who murdered his betrothed bride. I want to know all there is to know, and I believe it will come to me some time," she continued slowly, the conviction growing in her mind with strange, insistent force.

She still held the spur in her hand; she was going to put it in the drawer of the table. She laid it down on the old table, which was scarred and scratched with long usage. The drawer, warped by age, pulled awry when she opened it. There lay some books in it now, just as they had been placed by the master's hand. She stooped to read the titles: Milton's "Paradise Lost," a copy each of Shakespeare's and Tennyson's poems, worn and thumbed with much handling, bindings faded and broken.

"My cousin's friends," she said, laying her hand

tenderly on the treasured companions of his lonely life.

He could not have been quite unhappy with such companionship, she thought. She did not disturb them, but with a little wrench drew the drawer farther out that she might lay the spur behind them, when there came into view another and smaller compartment of the drawer. A partition divided it into two parts, leaving a narrow box-like space at the back. This partition she had thought was the back of the drawer when she had looked into it before. She pulled the drawer quickly from its place and set it on the table.

The small division was partly filled with papers. No more welcome sight could have met her eye. Her hand trembled with excitement as she moved them about. At last she came upon what looked like a bundle of manuscripts. Was her desire to be gratified? She grasped it eagerly, hungrily, as a miser his gold, for her eyes had lighted on the words "My Story," written across the top of the page. The writing looked like her cousin's. Could it be the story of his life that she held in her hands?

Her fingers trembled and the leaves fluttered between them. At last she had found the end. Yes, it was there, "Henry Steyne," the name before all others she wanted most to find written there. There was no longer a doubt, she had in her hands what she had long wished for.

She laid the spur in the place where she had found the manuscript, and pushed the drawer back. She cared no more now for what it might contain. She closed the window, then went down the stair, and

hung the long gray cloak carefully over the particular nail, the third, counting to the left, that hid the spring. She desired more than ever that the room should remain undiscovered.

She passed out of the house, into the sunshine, and calling her dog, strolled out to the wood. She sat down at the foot of the spreading beech tree where she often lingered. Now that she had her cousin's story she almost feared to read it. She would not, she decided, until she was composed and quiet. And an hour later, when Axem came to bring her a letter, she was still sitting, looking across the valley, with the unread papers lying in her lap.

While Margaret read her letter the little black maid sprawled on the cool grass, thrusting out her tongue derisively at the huge dog, daring him to "jes' put yer paw on me," while he good-naturedly regarded her as he would an active fly. But when her mistress had finished reading her letter, Axem gathered herself up and stood respectfully before her, waiting to be spoken to. This little prelude or ceremonial she never omitted when she had anything to communicate.

"What is it, Axem?"

"I saw him down dar," indicating by a wag of her head the village below.

"Saw him? Who was it you saw?"

"Why him; dat ole tecky-gobble lawyeh what was heah y'ste'day."

"Why, Axem! Are you sure you saw him?" Margaret exclaimed in astonishment, almost fear.

"Shuah!" asserted Axem stoutly. "I knows

'im, de ole pizen snake. He done onlock you'ns' writin' cubboad wid a key when you'ns went upstairs. I done see 'im down dar dis mawin's true's I lib."

Margaret Steyne drew in her breath sharply; a feeling of terror was coming upon her. Why was he still in the neighborhood? Was he so eager to carry out his threats of vengeance that he would not return to Richmond until he could form some plan or discover something to aid him? She thought now of her cousin's words, "He would make a hard, bitter enemy to man or woman;" and he was her enemy now, and she felt that her cousin had spoken truly.

"What did you say you saw him do while I was out of the room yesterday—look in my desk?"

"Yes, missus, I did. I cross my heart."

"How did you come to see him?"

"I dis' went fru de hall, an I see 'im plain as de sun in de heaben."

"Did he see you?"

"Naw, 'im had his'n back to de doah."

Margaret rose hurriedly and went to the house. She was more disturbed by the news of this man's proximity than she wanted to own to herself. Miss Price was coming through the front door on her way to find her.

"Rebecca, Axem says she saw Harris down at Walsingham this morning. Is it true?" she asked anxiously, with lips that trembled despite her efforts.

"Yes, it's true enough. I saw him, and I reckon he didn't want me to see him either. The way he skedaddled behind that store building out of sight was mighty funny. I shouldn't have seen him, but

Axem clapt her eyes on him too quick, and told me to look. He was talking to Cy Smith."

"That's the postmaster, you mean?"

"Yes; and when I saw that, thinks I, he isn't up to any good; spying round here like's not to learn something, and he might get things through Cy Smith he could get no other way."

"Oh, Rebecca! you don't mean the mail, do you?"

"Yes, partly. I didn't like the looks of it. I thought it over while I was buying groceries at the other store, and when I got through I went back to the post-office, got the mail, for the train was in by that time, and I think he went away on that train too. Well, I got some envelopes and some stamps, and talked sociably to Cy Smith about his folks, and found out I knew some of them, which always makes a Virginian sociable. Then I led up to asking him who the man was he had been talking to?"

"'Wa'll now,' he says in that odd way of his—he always sprawls his words—'why, it wuz the lawyer as doos business fer the new missis up at Sten House. Seems strange ye didn't sense who it wuz; thought ye'd 'a' knowed 'im sure.'

"'I do know the lawyer, but my eyes aren't as good as they used to be. I am not as young as you be,' said I; and that pleased him, for, you see, he is a widower. But I told him he was mistaken; that Harris used to be the lawyer for your cousin, and had been for you too, but he wasn't any more; the business had all been settled up, and he wouldn't be coming back any more, unless he had other busi-

ness. 'Isn't he a sort of post-office detective, or hasn't he something to do with it?' I ventured.

"'What's that?' he said nervously, eying me with them queer blue eyes of his that look like blue-chiny teacups, most ready to jump out of his head.

"'Why, the postmaster at Washington,' I explained, 'sends men out on the quiet, to see if things are going on right. They sometimes try to get the postmaster to do something that is against the law; then they report to Washington, and often the post-offices are taken from the postmasters, and they have to pay money fines too.' Before I was through he was so badly scared he was shaking like a quaking-asp leaf. I knew then that I had guessed right when I had suspected Harris of wanting to tamper with things through Cy Smith. But you may rest assured of one thing; he will get no favors there, nor information either. That post-office has been the ambition of Cy Smith's life. He'll talk no more to strangers, nor allow anybody to meddle with the mails," declared Miss Rebecca.

"Well, Rebecca, I am proud of you. You are a born diplomat; I shall never be afraid again," asserted Margaret. "But poor Smith! what a fright you must have given him!"

"It was hardly fair and neighborly," acknowledged Miss Price, "but it's better to have a man afraid of you than you to be afraid of him."

"Much the safest, I am sure," replied Margaret. "But how surely each day brings us our little comedy, if we only see it, amid the more serious things of life which crowd upon us; and they do

press upon us, fence and protest against them as we may."

"Now I have some good news to tell you," said Miss Price, cheerfully. "Mr. Morgan has come and brought lumber and carpenters, a lot of them, with teams and everything, and they are already at work on his house."

"That is pleasant news;" and Margaret's face brightened as a cloud-shadow touched by a sunbeam; "for now we know that we shall soon have neighbors."

"Yes," said Rebecca, "only I do wish it was Mr. Thorne; I should feel that comfort had camped down beside me. I never knew anyone whom I trusted and believed in, on short acquaintance, as I trusted and believed in him. He is such a positive person, I feel safe to let him tell me what to do, and do it without question."

"Yes, I think he would impress most people so," Margaret returned.

"I have always liked him," continued Rebecca. "It seemed from the first that I had always known him."

"I'm sure I look upon him as my only rival in your affections. It is a mutual falling in liking, I believe;" and Margaret smiled a little.

She always smiled at Rebecca's enthusiasm about Mr. Thorne, and encouraged it. She liked to see her friend moved to the expression of her feelings, for the austere, rigid New England training and self-restraint under which she had grown up, in connection with her lonely, self-contained life, had taken not a little of the beauty and sweetness out

of her nature, which Margaret wanted to see restored. But the smiles died away from Margaret's face as she glanced down at the roll of papers in her hand.

"Rebecca, have you anything particular to do to-day? If you have, won't you finish it before noon? I have something I want to read to you. I have found 'Henry Steyne's Story,' written by himself. I've been waiting for you to come home that we might read it together."

"I want to know!" exclaimed Miss Rebecca. "Why, how and where did you find it? Are you sure it is his own story? You have read it, you say?" Miss Price was more excited than Margaret had often seen her.

"Only enough of it to know that it is truly the story of his life. I found it among his books, and I am so glad."

"Well! I reckon I'm more glad than I can tell, for now we can get at the truth of things we have wanted to know but could only wonder and guess about. I'll go right off to the poultry yard, instead of waiting until after dinner. Come out and see the new flocks I have taken off the past two days," said Rebecca, looking closely but furtively at Margaret's face; and by some contrivance she kept close to her through the hour that remained before dinner.

XVIII.

THE STORY OF HENRY STEYNE.

"MANY times in the years gone by, when I sat by my lonely fireside, and memory was busy with the events of my life, I have been tempted to write them down. Then I would change my mind about it, and not do it. I do not know that I am more wavering than most men who have no motive to urge them to do a thing. Sometimes I think it must be so. But when I look back over my life I see but a wide, dreary, barren waste, with nothing left to mark it but dark spots of pain and suffering. It cannot be lived over, cannot be helped or undone. Why, then, should I write about it? I look before me into the future and see nothing that gives promise that my life's story would be of help to anyone near and dear to me. There are none such. My kindred, if any live, are all distant. I know them not. He who will come after me into this house may be happily married, with a houseful of romping boys and girls. They would not heed it. Why, then, should I trouble about it?

"Thus I reasoned, not once but many times, and the years went by. At last I have been brought to a decision, by an incident which happened to me to-night.

"I sat before my slumbering fire without other light than the dull glow of the embers in the wide

fire-hole. The logs crackled and fell apart, and the golden sparks showered upwards. I watched the picture in dreamy enjoyment while the twilight came softly on. It is the hour of all the day around which the saddest and sweetest memories of my life cluster.

"I searched among the ashes of the past, and culled out the happiest memories I could find, hugging them to my heart with as much pain as joy, when suddenly a pistol-shot rang out on the air. Then life seemed to be going out of me in one great throb of agony, and for a brief time the tragedy of my life was before me again, as real as it had been at first. I felt at my side the clinging, shrinking form of my bride, and saw the red stain on the white gown over the stilled heart. We ofttimes think we have buried a sorrow ; then, some day, without warning, we find it tearing at our heart.

"Not for almost twenty years had I heard a solitary pistol-shot at that hour in the evening. It is the one sound at all times that I cannot bear to hear, the one sound I have constantly striven to avoid hearing.

"I sent for my black man and questioned him. He said it had been fired by young Jack Cranston, Squire Cranston's son. Going this way for a short-cut home from Walsingham, he had fired his pistol at a rabbit that sprang out of covert. So the voices of memory will not be still to-night. They chase each other tumultuously through my heart and brain in restless waves and throbs of sadness. They clamor once again to be heard and will not be hushed until I give them utterance. So be it, I will write.

"It is the fifth of October, and the new autumn wind is in the chimney. I draw my table near the fire, snuff my candles, and begin.

"There was nothing out of common in my childhood to record. I had no brothers or sisters; I lived at home, and studied under a tutor while my father lived. I was fourteen when he was drowned in a steamboat disaster on the Mississippi. After that my mother was never strong, and to relieve her of the oversight of my education I was sent to a private school for boys within easy reach of home. Later I went to college, where I remained until I graduated, spending only my vacations at home. When I was twenty-eight I was alone in the world.

"After that I stayed at home a year looking after the plantation. But it was a lonely life, and in the fall when I was twenty-nine I arranged my affairs for an absence of some months and went to New Orleans to stay the winter. I had a number of college friends there who made a very pleasant time for me, for, while I had my apartments at the inn, I saw much of them in their own homes. It was when I stayed a few days at the home of Caleb Harvey—he had been a junior while I was a senior, but I had done him some small favor which he remembered gratefully—that I met his only sister. When I first looked into her eyes I recognized that sweet affinity of soul which is nature's own law of love, and I felt that this love, which sprang into being at sight of her, would pervade my life, and rule it in all its best impulses, as it ever has ruled it.

"Could I describe to you the slender, sylph-like form, the bonnie sweet face, its rare, dark beauty,

with the color coming and going fitfully in the velvet cheek—could I picture to you all this, you could not see the love-light in the sweet eyes, as I saw it, the love-light that kindled there for me.

"I loved Marian from the first hour I saw her; and when we had known each other but a few weeks she was my promised wife. So sweet and womanly was she in her new dignity that the measure of my happiness was complete. O Heavenly Father, if it could have remained to me!— I can write no more to-night.

"This is the eighth day of the month. The wind has risen in the last hour, and brings a scent of rain with it. The brown leaves go by with a flurry, and as I look, there is a soft rush of mist on the pane. I am glad that it rains. I shall stay by my hearth to-day, and take up my story.

"No obstacle was interposed to our marriage, and an early day was set for it, the tenth of May. I have been told many times since that May is an unlucky month in which to be married; and maybe it is true; who knows? I was going to remain in New Orleans till then. When I had spoken of going North to prepare my home for her reception, she said she would rather have me stay in New Orleans, that we might spend the remaining time together; and then she would like to go with me to my home just as it was. She did not wish me to change it because she was going into it.

"I was pleased that she was so considerate; but what gratified me most was that she did not want to be separated from me, even for so short a time.

I remember her words : 'Our courtship has been so short, dear, I do not want to lose any of it ; the present is all we are sure of. Let us not sacrifice too much of our happiness.'

"I have often wondered whether or not she had a presentiment of what the future might bring. If so, she never told me of it ; but I thank God over and over that I did as she wanted me to do. I should have had a lifelong remorse had I left her.

"Time passed swiftly. It lacked but a few days of our wedding day—five short days. I was spending the evening with her, and we had gone out on the veranda to watch the fireflies ; it was becoming dusk, and they had gathered thick in the low-growth trees, where they made a pretty sight. Caleb, her brother, was on the veranda, leaning against the railing. We all stood talking together in a light way, when I was startled by seeing a woman's face in the shrubbery, close on our right. It was a wild, dark face, and had a hunted look. This was all I saw, for it was but as a flash. Whether Caleb saw the face or not I do not know. He did not speak, but stepped back just as a pistol-shot rang out on the air. It startled us all, and the hands of my dear one at my side closed over my arm convulsively. I felt her shrink, and put my arm about her ; but when I looked down the warm blood was fast dyeing her white gown. I took her in my arms, but the sweet eyes were set and still. She was dead ! Shot through the heart, they said. My dear one ! I called aloud on God to slay me, and then I remembered nothing more.

"It was weeks before I recovered consciousness,

they told me, and months before I was able to leave the house. I had had a brain fever, and no one thought I would live.

"The murderess had not been found, and I felt that my life had been spared that I might track the assassin of my bride. She had not an enemy, but was beloved by all who knew her, and no clue could be found. Caleb had seen no one in the shrubbery, he said; but I had seen, and the cruel face which only for a moment had looked forth from the dark bank of foliage, would never fade from my memory while consciousness endured. And it has not, but is as plain to me to-night as the night I saw it.

"With only the face to guide me I set out on my search. Her people had given up all hope of learning anything of the murderer, Caleb saying to me that I was foolish to attempt finding a trace at that late day, that in my weak condition it was worse than folly, and that I should not think of it, at least until I was strong; I should only make myself ill again.

"It was true that I could not get about much, yet I employed two of the best detectives in New Orleans, and helped them all I could by telling them what I knew of the circumstances, describing again and again the woman's face. But it was little I myself could do—nothing but watch for the face; and I never ceased to look for that.

"The old physician who had attended me during my long illness was very kind. I believe he was sincerely my friend, and wished to aid me. He would come to the inn and take me with him in his drives when he went about among his patients. I

spent hours at a time in his carriage, always looking anxiously, eagerly for the dark, bitter face, as I saw it framed in by the shrubbery, but never finding it. Many other kind friends among the people of New Orleans would have aided me materially if they could have done so. They did help me with their sympathy and kind words to bear the burden which sometimes seemed too heavy. Caleb was with me much of the time, spending days and nights with me at my rooms. He was always anxious to hear of the progress the detectives were making, but never appeared hopeful. I did not wonder so much at this; time was dragging wearily to him. He was betrothed to a beautiful young woman, a wealthy heiress to whom he was to have been married before this; but the wedding day had been postponed on account of the terrible sorrow in his family.

"He was growing impatient of the delay, and I felt sorry for him. Perhaps I was not as sorry as he thought I ought to have been, for to me it seemed so small a thing to fret over and be impatient about, when he could see his betrothed and be with her at any hour of the day. He said he liked to be with me as much of the time as he could, and in my loneliness and helplessness I learned to look up to him and to lean on him. I would have reached out my hands to any human being who might have been associated with me at that time. I was so lonely and despairing, and he was her brother, and he came to have a much stronger influence over me than anyone else ever had before, and to-day I always feel it when in his presence. There was one

point, however, on which he was powerless to move me. I would not discharge the detectives and give up the search for the murderer of my loved one. He thought I was foolish and stubborn. Well, I may have seemed so, but it was like tearing out my heart to think of relinquishing the search. It was sadly true that I had nothing yet on which to build any hopes of success, and the weeks passed quickly by, as they ever do, whether we run with swift pulses that leap for joy, or go wearily on life's way with the slow, dragging steps of sorrow.

"The detectives could find no clue, and were ready to give up the search if I would say they might, but I would not say the word.

"Things were in this state, when one morning Caleb burst into my room in great agitation. His face was pale and haggard, and his eyes were not pleasant to look at; his voice was hoarse with passion, and he flung out his words impetuously.

"'Do you know what this cursed delay has cost me?' he cried. 'Read that!' and he threw on to the table a letter. I was shocked at his language, but he was in such a state of excitement that I forgave him, and after I had read the letter I thought no more of it. This was the letter:

"'CALEB HARVEY:

"'Sir:

"'I take this means of informing you that the story of your perfidy to that young girl, which drove her to attempt your life, is known to me and to my ward.

"'Your engagement with Miss Flemming is at

an end, and you will hereafter consider yourself a stranger to my household, where your coming would be looked upon as an intrusion.

"'JAMES THORNE.'

"This was the strange letter I read. I was indeed astonished and disturbed. James Thorne was the guardian of Miss Flemming, the heiress to whom Caleb was betrothed,

"'What does it mean, Caleb?' I inquired, with sincere sympathy.

"'What does it mean?' he gasped fiercely. 'I should think you might understand plain English when it's before you?'

"'But, Caleb, what is it all about? Tell me what he means,' I urged, for I was sorrowful for him.

"'What is it all about?' he almost shrieked, in his anger and excitement tramping back and forth across the room furiously. 'What could it be about but a lot of damned rubbish which has reached his ears? And he takes his high horse and treats me to this;' and curses rained from his lips.

"'But stop,' I entreated. 'You may be able to explain it all to Mr. Thorne. Write and explain to him. Can you not?'

"'Explain to him!' he groaned. 'No, unfortunately, I cannot make matters any plainer; they are too plain now by half.'

"'Do you mean, Caleb, that it is true what he says?' I asked earnestly, for I could not bring myself to think it of him.

"Then he faced about toward me and looked me

straight in the eyes, his hands thrust nervously down into his pockets. He stood as still as a statue, and spoke with an even voice and with a deliberation that proved to me that he was speaking desperately, and speaking the truth.

"'Yes,' he said, 'I mean that it is true, only I never promised to marry the girl. I did have a fancy for her, and would have continued to provide for her, but, you see, I couldn't marry her.' He faltered, and shifted his eyes uneasily from my face, but went on :

"'Don't you see I couldn't, and ruin my prospects for life? She was not my equal ; she was but a French-Acadian ; and when I told her plainly that I could not and would not marry her, she swore by everything holy and sacred to have her revenge, swore that she would kill me. And then she began following me to even my home, lurking about the grounds, and you know what followed ; she shot at me. But I swear to you I did not believe she would try to take my life, or that there was any danger to me or to anyone. How could I? I swear it,' he said, as he looked at my face.

"I felt as though the touch of death was on me. All the blood in my body seemed concentrating in my heart. He talked on, but I did not comprehend his words. Every faculty was paralyzed, for how long I do not know. Then, as a mighty torrent bursts forth, the blood surged through my veins with throbs of pain. I saw it all ; the face in the shrubbery, the girl whom Caleb Harvey had betrayed and cast off—she was the murderer of my betrothed wife, my darling !

"It was easy reading now, in the light of his confession. And her brother had known from the first; he had labored to shield the murderer of his sister from discovery and punishment, perhaps had concealed her. I knew now whence came the secret opposition that had paralyzed all my efforts. The detectives had not been mistaken, as I had thought.

"I rose to my feet, and pointing to the door, said: 'Go! out of my sight! I never wish to hear your voice or look upon your face again.'

"For an instant he shrank from me, but my words were as unavailing as a passing breath of a summer morn against the rugged mountain. He gathered himself together and prepared to oppose his strength and iron will against my enfeebled and suffering powers. Standing before me he said resolutely:

"'No, I will not go! I will stay where I am until you listen to me. There is nothing more to be done; everything is ended for us both. The Acadian girl, Mercedes La Clere, is dead. There is no murderer to punish. She died less than a week ago.'

"He paused, that I might have time to realize the full meaning of his words.

"'You knew this,' I cried, 'and knew where she was hiding, and shielded her, the murderer of your own sister?'

"'I did not know where she was,' he exclaimed; 'I swear I did not. It is true, I did not want you to find her, for I knew she had not meant to do it; that it was I she intended to kill. God, man! do you think I should have set the officers on her track

and dragged her up for punishment, and brought disgrace and sorrow on my family? They have had trouble enough already.'

"'You forget to add,' I retorted, 'that it would have ruined your prospects of marrying a wealthy woman.'

"'No, I do not,' he answered almost wearily, and without a trace of anger. 'I am not likely to forget that I have lost the woman I love, but I give you my solemn word I did not know where Mercedes was. She disappeared so suddenly and entirely from all her old haunts that I was puzzled. I had them watched, but could find no clue to her whereabouts.'

"'How do you know she is dead? How do I know that you are speaking the truth?' I demanded, seeking to justify my suspicions of his honesty.

"I am speaking the truth. She is dead. The priest who took her dying confession carried it to James Thorne, Marie's guardian. It is all true, and it is so horribly, damnably true, too, that life is over for me here. I shall leave this place forever.' When he said that, he turned white and sat down. His mouth twitched nervously.

"'Don't cast me off, Henry,' he pleaded. 'Let us leave here together, and go where we will never hear this talked of. I cannot endure anything more. Surely I have been punished enough. I have suffered, God knows. We have both suffered. Let us go away.'

"I was moved by his words, but would not answer as he wished. I would see this priest; I must

hear for myself that what Caleb had told me was true ; I would not remain with a doubt in my mind. Caleb would rather I should not see the priest, but he gave me directions where to find him.

"It was in one of the suburbs of New Orleans where a part of the old French settlement had been, and there I found him, a venerable father among his poor and lowly people, sacrificing all to them, laboring assiduously for their welfare, though burdened with the weight of three score years and ten. Those years of loving, unselfish ministry had made him almost divinely sympathetic with those who sorrowed, his judgment more merciful, his words of comfort more tender, his counsels more wise. I shall never forget the hour I passed with him, never outlive the influences that sprang from the time spent with the venerable priest of that lowly parish in the poor district of New Orleans.

"What Caleb had told me was true, but he had not told me all. The French-Acadian girl was dead, but she had died giving birth to a child of which Harvey was the father.

"'The poor child,' said the priest, pityingly, 'was almost crazed when she knew what she had done. She had meant to kill him, and then give herself up to the officers of the law. "Why," she cried despairingly, "was I the sport of so cruel a fate? Why did the deadly bullet speed amiss and pierce the heart of that pure and innocent girl?"' And shivering and starting like some hunted thing at every shadow, shrinking at every sough of the wind through the trees, the girl fled in terror through the darkness to the lonely swamps, and begged the

sheltering protection of some negroes whom she had known in her childhood, and with whom she remained hidden in safety, bless the Virgin Mary, until the hour of her peril, when she had sent for him. She mourned bitterly, the priest said, for the crime she had unintentionally committed, and left her confession with him, to be used in case anyone else were charged with the murder. But he had thought it right to use it in the way he had, for the mother of Marie Flemming, Caleb Harvey's betrothed, had been a beloved member of his parish, and at her deathbed he had promised to watch over and befriend her child. When he learned the character of the man whom the daughter was about to marry, he had gone to her, but she refused to believe the story or to give him up. Then he went to her guardian, Mr. Thorne, and laid before him the confession, and told him the story of the dead girl. Mr. Thorne had been justly indignant, and acted promptly and decisively in the matter, dismissing Harvey in words not to be disregarded. This I knew from the letter I had read. If Marie Flemming married against his wishes or without his consent, she should not control her fortune. There was no appeal from her guardian's decision.

"When I asked the priest for advice, he said, 'Go back to your Virginia home, take up the duties of your life there, and be as merciful as you can find it in your heart to be to all the erring and sinful of God's creatures.'

"I have tried faithfully to do so. I know now that I have been merciful to weakness, which is sin.

"It was late when I returned to my rooms after visiting the priest, but Caleb was there to meet me, nor did he leave until I had consented to quit the city with him. I do not know how I was won to his wishes. I felt deeply the truth of his words: 'There is nothing more for us to do. Life is over for us here. Let us go away and begin again.'

"Life was over for me, wherever I might be. Something had gone out of it that could never return. I was indifferent to what the future might bring. The words of the aged priest, 'Go home and be merciful,' rang in my ears day and night, and became my beacon-light on that desolate waste of troubled waters. My soul fastened upon them. They led me. Within twenty-four hours we had left New Orleans forever."

"October 18th: We came here to my old home, and settled down quietly. I was still in poor health and unable to go about much. Caleb stayed with me for some weeks, but he grew restless and discontented, and it was a relief when he finally said that he must go away and study law in earnest. He had read only for pastime before; now he declared his intention of making it his life-work. He was without funds, and I was pleased to help him to his desires; so he went away to a small college town. I do not remember the name of the place, but it was near the Maryland line. He remained almost two years. I heard from him occasionally only, for Caleb was never a prolific correspondent. After he had taken his examination and was ready for admission to the bar, he paid me a short visit

and told me that he meant to make a beginning in the practice of his profession in Richmond.

"I was pleased to hear this, I told him ; it would not be so far away but that he could come up often and spend a day or night with me, and he would be where he could attend to my business, which would be a relief to me, and make a beginning for him. So I gave him certain claims to adjust, and full instructions about my affairs, putting everything into his hands ; my health was so variable and uncertain that I could count on being able to leave the house only on my best days.

"Before Caleb left he told me something by which I was sorely grieved. He meant to change his name, he said. It should be as though he was dead, and under a new name he would build up a reputation for himself and create a new life. He would succeed in his profession ; he would work early and late to do it. He knew he could make money and independence for himself, and he would not be bound by the old name.

"I said all I could to him to dissuade him. It was a wrong plan, I told him, and would surely work him regret some day, if not harm. But he would not listen. I then told him that he need not take charge of my business ; but he paid no heed to my wishes, for, shortly after he went to Richmond, he sent me some papers to sign and return to him, with an envelope already addressed for me to use, directed to J. C. Harris. That was the name he was known by there, and I was obliged by the force of these circumstances to submit to and in a manner aid what I felt to be wrong. How

often it is that we are the unwilling instrument in another's hand for evil!

"The years passed on, with their changes, their joys and sorrows. I had lived quietly, which was in my favor. In fact I had about regained my shattered health, and was making preparations to again take up an active life, and plant extensively. To this end I had taken a long day's journey on horseback to engage an overseer who had worked for me in former times. The weather was warm and spring-like when I left home, but during my return journey a heavy rain set in when I was yet many miles from home and before I could reach shelter of any kind. I got thoroughly wet, and, to make matters worse, the weather suddenly turned cold. I was chilled and contracted a severe cold which brought me into a rheumatic fever, from the consequences of which I have ever since suffered, being unable in damp weather to leave the house and ofttimes my bed. I realized that I must abandon the thought of managing my estate; so I disposed of my field hands, let a portion of the plantation to an adjoining planter, and prepared to live the only kind of existence I seemed now fitted for, a quiet, secluded life. Caleb, for so I will still call him, had again and again urged me to sell my slaves and invest my money in stocks and securities, giving as his reason that my health was too delicate for active life.

"I afterward learned that it was his own interest he was considering by this advice, and not mine, as he contrived to net a very handsome income from the investments, over and above what I received.

I also learned that he had changed his name more than a year before he spoke to me of his intention to do so, and that in many ways he had been unscrupulous and insincere.

"Caleb Harvey has fulfilled the promise he made for himself. He has become one of the first lawyers in Richmond. His practice is large, he has money invested, and is prosperous. What may the end be? I ask myself. Do men who act wickedly and wrong their fellow-man go free always? Does punishment never overtake them in this world?

"Some months since, I laid my pen down and said that my story was finished. I have just learned that my next of kin, my one remaining relative, is a young woman, and somehow I am glad that a gentle-natured woman is to come into this old house after me.

"Later:—I have had a new experience to-day, a message from that long-dead past which I had thought forever buried in silence as deep as the tomb. A letter has come to me from the old physician who attended me through that long illness in New Orleans. He has grown old and given up practice, he writes, and time has hung heavily on his hands. In his abundant leisure he sought distraction in looking over his old papers. Among them he found one of my visiting cards which bore my address, and from a kindly impulse he sought now to learn of me. He spoke of Caleb Harvey; of his early death. It caused me great surprise that the report of his death should have existed there so long without contradic-

tion. Caleb must have known of it. And for the first time, I learned, too, of a report which I never knew existed, a story so outrageous that I am filled with a terrible anger whenever I think of it. The story was that a young girl whom I had betrayed and cast off had in her jealous rage murdered my betrothed to prevent my marriage! And this horrible falsehood had been accepted by many, and believed—even by those who called me friend—to be the true explanation of that terrible event.

"All these years I have weakly borne this shameful burden of duplicity and cowardice; and the author of this falsehood—it was now known for a certainty—was Caleb Harvey. In my anguish I can only say, God forgive him; I never can, and I am near unto death.

"HENRY STEYNE."

XIX.

THORNE'S CONFESSION.

"Two shall be born the whole wide world apart,
And speak in different tongues, and have no thought
Each of the other's being, and no heed;
And these, on unknown seas to unknown lands
Shall cross, escaping wreck, defying death,
And all unconsciously shape every act
And bend each wandering step to this one end,
That one day, out of the darkness, they shall meet
And read life's meaning in each other's eyes!"

THOUGH early in the afternoon, the light was waning, for the sun had not shone all day. The sky, which in the early morning had been hazy, had grown gray and lowering.

Rebecca Price had drawn her sewing chair close to the window, that she might catch the fading light, but she found the fine needlework on which she was engaged trying to the eyes, and her glance wandered down the hill toward the new house which was springing into shape with a speed that appeared almost magical to one accustomed to the deliberate movements of the old-time Virginia builder. The ground sloped gently all the way to the new house; and already a faint path stretched like a ribbon across the grass, which had been trodden by the workmen coming for water. The passing to and fro daily brought a neighborly air between the old and the

new houses, very gratifying to the inmates of Steyne House.

Some one was coming up the path now, "a slip of a black boy," as Miss Price said when she had changed her glasses. He was making his way leisurely along, as is the habit of his race, missing no opportunity the while to amuse himself by flinging small stones at the fugitive ground-chippy; stoping now and then to search some tuft of grass for the coveted nest, with its treasure of spotted eggs. At last, when no more chippies were to be scared up, he set his course straight for the old house. Miss Price then remembered the dog, and leaving the window, went down and waited by the poultry yard.

When the loiterer saw her he came on a little more quickly, meanwhile exploring with both hands, but fruitlessly, the depths of his trousers' pockets. Suddenly he seemed to remembered, and seizing the crown of a straw hat from his head, he fished a letter out of it, grinning triumphantly. He did not offer the letter to Miss Price, but held it defiantly behind his back as though he suspected the tall, severe-looking woman before him of a desire to pounce upon him and forcibly wrest it from him.

"Well, my boy, and who are you wanting to see?" she asked, secretly amused at the young monkey's antics.

"Is ye Missy Pwice?"

"Yes, I am Miss Price. Have you a letter for me?"

"Is ye her shuah?" and the small African eyed her distrustfully. "'Cos he done say I's ter be

mighty shuah 'bout it, an' done gib it to Miss Pwice her own se'f."

"Well, you may give it to me; you have made no mistake. Was there to be any answer?"

"He nevah done say noffin'—" but the words ended in a screech of terror. "Golly! wha' dat?" and with a face the picture of fear the boy plunged behind Miss Price, and seizing her skirts drew them protectingly around him, clinging to them with both hands, his eyes glaring white under her elbow.

"Mercy alive, boy!" she exclaimed, almost upset by the sudden onslaught, "whatever ails you, to make you so panicky?" and grabbing back, she clutched him fairly and endeavored to loose her skirts from his hold. Then her glance fell on the dog coming leisurely along through the yard, and the little negro's fright was explained.

"Come!" she said firmly; "it's just our dog; he won't hurt you."

The boy at once let go of her clothing, and ventured out by her side, still breathing hard and showing a suspicious degree of white in his eye.

"Gosh! I done tot' hit's a tagger, shuah 'nuf. Him's pow'ful big dawg. Good fi'tin' dawg, I 'spect."

"Yes, he is big, and very powerful; a dangerous dog to meddle with, but he will not hurt you while you are with me. I'll chain him up now, and you can go."

The boy did not linger, but scampered down the slope with a celerity foreign to his hereditary proclivities. He had a definite purpose now—to get away from that dog as quickly as possible. The ground-chippy no longer had any attractions.

When Miss Price saw that the letter was from Mr. Thorne, she was surprised that he should send a letter in this way, with such strict instructions about its delivery, instead of through the mail. He must be in the neighborhood, she decided. She went up to her room, bolted the door, and broke the seal.

"My Dear Miss Price:

"In many ways in times past have you proved your friendship for me, yet I ask this one proof more. Do not refuse my petition, though what I ask may seem strange. I am here at Walsingham and must see you. I cannot go back without. Do not tell anyone that I am here, nor of this note; but meet me to-night at dusk on the hill by the pecan tree. I ask you to do this, because I know that I should not go to the house now, but I surely will go if I can see you in no other way. You will come, I feel sure, because you have always been kind to your friend,

"Thorne."

Miss Price was mystified. What could he want to see her about, that he was so urgent? He might have written before, and why did he not write now, instead of coming and asking her to steal out after dark to meet him? Why, I never did the like when I was young, and it's pretty late now to begin such practices. Perhaps, though, the later the better, if a body is going to do such things, said Miss Price sententiously to the silver-bowed spectacles, which it was her habit to hold in her hand and talk to, when troubled or when she felt communicative.

But conventionalism would not weigh in the balance against Miss Price's loyalty to a friend, and such a friend as Thorne. She felt that he was right in saying that he should not come to the house ; it was wise and considerate in him to remain away.

Little dreamed Rebecca Price that the reason Thorne gave to himself for this hard decision was widely divergent from the one she ascribed to him. Little did she dream of what it cost him to remain away. But she knew that he would come to the house if she did not keep the appointment he asked for.

The next hour was full of perplexity and indecision to her. She meant to do as Thorne had asked her to do ; she had decided that point, but how could she account to Margaret for her absence, or rather, not account for it. To a nature unused to subterfuge the undertaking seemed fraught with difficulties. And she would not lie ; all the Puritan blood in her welled up in resolute protest at the bare thought. But it had to be managed somehow, and she was sorely troubled, evolving and dismissing many plans ; and no satisfactory adjustment of the difficulty had come to her, when old Hagar's voice came wending up from below :

"Say, Missey Becky, hit's done comin' on to rain putty soon. Is de biddies shet up in de yawd ?"

Miss Price hastened below, gladly responding to the demands of the moment, when she knew what to do and how to do it. There was great relief to her in the necessity for prompt activity.

"I thank my Maker for manual labor," she exclaimed to herself devoutly. "It just lets off the

strain from the mind, and keeps a lot of people from going stark mad."

The rain came, dropping hit and miss, as she returned to the house. She had but time to change her damp clothing, when tea was ready.

As she came into the room Margaret turned from the window.

"At last it rains. I am glad that it does; and it's going to be an all-night rain, I think. And I believe," she said after a moment's pause, "that I will spend the evening in my room, reading over some old papers which I have allowed to lie until I was in the mood. You won't be lonely if I leave you to pass the evening by yourself, will you, Rebecca?"

Miss Price looked up almost startled, but took time to set her teacup down before she answered her.

"No, I shan't be lonely. I don't know the meaning of the word any more. And I always like to sit alone myself before my fire on a rainy night. I'll see to the locking-up before I go upstairs."

Thankfulness possessed her heart that the way had been made easy for her to keep the appointment with Thorne.

"It does seem strange," she mused, "how things fall out. When your mind is all joggled, and you don't know what to do, they all at once just straighten themselves out, and everything is made smooth without a mite of your help."

Margaret had gone into the library, and sat idly watching Gabriel lay the fire on the hearth. The old man's systematic method of procedure always

amused her. He would examine with deliberation each piece of light wood, as though it must possess a special fitness for the place it was to occupy. But Gabriel's fires never sulked and went out ; like their builder, they did what was expected of them, and in the best way. To-night, when he had accomplished a fire to his satisfaction, he brushed the bits of pine and bark from the hearth with the turkey wing, then brought together the heavy oak shutters, dropped the bolt through the bars, and left the room.

A little later Miss Price came in on her usual nightly round of inspection before retiring, and seeing that everything was snug went to her own room, and Margaret was alone.

She sat by the old secretary, apparently lost in deep reflection. There was a pathetic curve to the sweet, sensitive mouth, which made her look, if possible, more lovely and lovable than ever before. At last with a languid movement she drew her hand across her eyes, and rising went out into the hall. The bedroom candles stood on the rack, as they had stood through all the successive generations that had inhabited the old house. Margaret took a candle which Rebecca had lighted for her, opened the closet door, and passed through, leaving the door slightly ajar.

Margaret had a fancy to visit the secret room. She wanted to sit wrapped in its silence, and hear the rain beat upon the roof. She was in a strange mood. She hardly understood herself. She could not read ; her hands rested on the table, and with a little sigh she laid her face down on them. The rain

came down in torrents, making minor melody on shingle and pane. Dreamily she listened to its changeful, sobbing rythm, and the pain went out of her eyes; the red lips grew softly smiling.

No sound of a muffled footstep reached her from the hall below. No noise of a cautiously opened door was borne to her ear. The roar of the rain would have beaten down a louder noise than was made by the guarded movements of Miss Price, who, despite the rain, was going to meet her friend at the pecan tree by the wood. She was standing on the edge of the veranda, her large umbrella grasped firmly with both hands, and the grimness of determination was on her face, as she looked into the night, trying to accustom her sight to the blackness before she would plunge into it. But as she would have stepped down onto the walk a sound of footsteps held her still. There was a quick splash in the path, a sudden spring, and the lithe, supple figure of Thorne landed on the stone step below her, and with a firm hand he pressed her back out of the rain, while down on the floor with a thud went his dripping umbrella, as he exclaimed reprovingly:

"Do you never think of yourself, I wonder? How could you think so badly of me as to believe that I would allow you to expose yourself to this storm? I never should have forgiven myself had you done it. I have often wondered," he went on, "why, when a woman once makes up her mind to a sacrifice, she goes at it so—well, so headlong?"

"I don't know any other way to do," said Miss Price, "especially——"

"Especially if it be something she does not want to do, something which appears to her altogether unreasonable, and which she should not have been asked to do," he said, finishing her sentence from her assumed point of view.

Miss Price did not reply to his half-implied question, but said instead, "You are wet through, Mr. Thorne, and you must come into the house; there is no other way."

"I cannot do that; I will talk to you here."

"No," expostulated Miss Price," it is not necessary; there is a fire in the library. It is always lighted on damp evenings, and to-night the wind is in the north. We can talk there as long as we like, and no one the wiser."

"Are you certain of—of what you say?"

"Yes; we locked up for the night a full hour ago and went upstairs. Margaret is taking this evening to look over some papers in her own room. She will not be down again to-night, and she can't hear anything in this rain."

"Then I will go in, but more for your sake than my own, for I am not so wet as you think, barring my boots."

He followed her into the library. When he had thrown off his waterproof coat, it was as he said, only his boots were wet. He drew up the large arm-chair and sat before the fire, while Miss Price went out to remove her goloshes and wraps.

The fire had burned out its first blaze and sent forth but a fitful light, leaving the corners of the room in shadow. It was only when Miss Price had returned and lighted the candles that the room took

on that cheerful aspect which only sufficient light can give.

When Miss Price had seated herself opposite Thorne, he pushed his chair back and faced her, and then she saw a tired face with lines of suffering about the mouth, and a look in the dark eyes she had never seen there before. It was the same strong, clear-cut face, but the buoyant, hopeful look was no longer there. The look of possibility seemed to have gone out of his face, and one of dogged resolution to have come in its place; the look that says one is not ordering his life, but is making the best of it.

The heart of the woman ached with unspoken sympathy, for she knew that some heavy burden was upon him. What could it be? He raised his eyes and looked into the strong, sympathetic face of Miss Price, and began speaking slowly and without emotion.

"You are wondering why I am here, and why I did not come to the house direct, instead of asking you to come to meet me. This I knew you could not understand, but I bless you from my heart that you would have done what I asked, and so showed your generous confidence and regard for me. It will be something pleasant to look back to, for I am going to tell you that which may deprive me of your esteem and friendship. You may refuse to write to me, or to know me even. I might be wise," he said slowly, "and not do it, but I am not wise. I will tell you the truth and take the chances. You will be just and merciful, and you are loyal to those you love. I know that through you no other will ever suffer for my weakness."

Miss Price's first thought was of the lawyer. Had there been a quarrel, and had they met? Oh, anything but that! But his next words sent to the winds all suspicion of a duel.

"It was your letter that brought me," he went on. "I was away from camp. Our mails are irregular at best, and it did not reach me for nearly two weeks after it should have come. You wrote that she was ill, just how seriously you could not say, made ill through fright and persecution of that devilish villain Harris. And I was the cause."

Miss Price sat staring hard at the strong brown hand which shielded his eyes from the light, as though she would find there some explanation of the feeling that was taking hold of her, a strange, intangible fear her heart clutched at, yet repelled.

There was a slight noise by the chimney; it might have been the parting of the burnt log on the brass andirons, and the man's voice went on unheeding:

"I came because I could not endure the suspense of not knowing. I left camp the same hour I read your letter. From what you said I feared brain fever. If you had but written a second letter all would have been well. I came ostensibly on business with Morgan. I had to hear, don't you know; she might be ill unto death, and I not know it."

Did the man know how much his voice and eyes were revealing? Did he for one instant realize how sudden, how awful the shock of this revelation must be to this woman in whose commonplace, uneventful life there had been nothing dramatic, no

flashing up of the stronger passions of the human heart?

Miss Price felt herself grow cold and white with a great fear which could no longer be put away. For, as the lightning's flash reveals the sunken reef to the groping, bewildered mariner, so did the past stand revealed in the light of the present. It had all seemed right then, his attitude toward Margaret, his words, but she knew now that she had been blind, blind. This man loved Margaret, and this was what he was going to tell her. Could Margaret know this? Did she— Strong and unemotional as Rebecca Price was, she swayed in her chair and caught at the table. Thorne saw it, and his face paled and grew set.

"I meant to come to the house had she been ill," he said, "but when I asked Morgan and he told me that she, with you, had been down yesterday to see his new house, the relief was so great that it almost overpowered me, and I thanked God from a full heart. Don't turn your eyes away. I want to look into them and see there is no honest scorn, when I tell you that I am a coward, a miserable, dishonest coward; that I asked you to come out to meet me to-night because I dare not see her again. Yes; you know what I mean. I love her," he said hoarsely. "Do not spare me. I deserve it all; your wrath, your scorn, your contempt, but do not—" He choked down a sob, and bracing himself went on:

"I do not know how I came to love her. I never shall know. I was never a fool about women. It came upon me without warning. It was but a

word, a breath, and my whole being was stirred as it never had been stirred in my life before. And this feeling has grown in intensity, and strengthened with every hour spent in her presence—hours which seem to have been destined to us, and which I could not control."

Rebecca Price sat dazed and silent, without voice to utter a word, awed by the revelation and by the sight of a strong man's suffering.

"God knows I have tried to be honest and true; and you will believe me," he said earnestly, "when I tell you that it is the first time I have failed. Though the hours of happiness in my life have been few enough, and 'the moments of pain like the sands of the sea,' yet I have never wavered, but have tried to live the life of a true man. Now I have sinned—not intentionally, believe that; but it brings its same punishment. Can you, with your quiet, controlled nature, dream what it must mean to a man to be forced to see and meet the woman whom he loves with all the strength of which a man like myself is capable, and yet not dare, by so much as a word or look, try to win a return of that love?" and he dropped his face in his hands.

"You love her! You own it, and you are a married man. Oh, how could you?" There was horror in Miss Price's face, horror and censure in her voice. "I never dreamed of this," she moaned. Oh! she had done wrong; she saw it now.

"No, truly, you never dreamed of it, or you would not have written the kind of letter to me that you did. But I know, dear friend, that you will not make this harder for me than it is. I have told you

the truth, that you might help me to be strong, for in the last forty-eight hours I have found the limit of my endurance; a man does find it sometimes, finds it hard and sudden."

"I have been to blame, too. I see it now, too late." The resolute voice of Miss Price trembled, and the gray eyes filled with tears.

"No, you are not to blame. Don't say that. It could not have been different. No one has done wrong but myself. She does not know this, and, God bless her! she never shall know."

"Oh! I thank my heavenly Father for that," exclaimed Miss Price with pious fervor; and then Thorne knew the fear that had been in her mind, the fear that Margaret loved him.

"Yes, the sin is mine alone," he said; "and the punishment shall be mine. When I said good-bye to her the last time I was here, I meant never to see her again; but when I heard that she was ill and was being persecuted by Harvey, I felt that she needed a friend who could stand between her and harm. And I came, as I said I would if ever she needed me. I had to know about it, and I came to you. She would think it strange did she learn of my visit, but you will keep my secret. I know you will not fail me in this."

"I will keep your secret with my life," responded Miss Price warmly and gratefully. "I cannot feel thankful enough that she does not know it, nor thankful enough that you look at this as you do, and will not try to see her again. I am sorry for you. But you did right to tell me; it was the best thing to do, and I will do my part now, to prevent

any more harm being done. I will write no more idiotic letters. I have been blind, but what you have told me I will hold in my heart, and will help you if I can to bear this sorrow."

"I believe you," said Thorne, "and I want to tell you that I have wronged no other woman by this love. That regret, at least, is spared me. I had not meant to speak of this, but that you may judge more justly I will tell you the story of my life—the hasty marriage which has blighted it.

"Our marriage was arranged in greater part by our families. I had been abroad much of the time previous, and was totally unacquainted with facts which, had I been told them, would have changed all. But I brought to the woman I married all the love and loyalty of a young, inexperienced heart. She came to me loving another with all the strength of her undisciplined nature, and in the first months of our married life she boasted of the love she still bore this man, and taunted me with the fact that she had married me only because she had not been permitted by her guardian to become the wife of the man she loved. Need I say that this killed what faith I had had in woman's goodness?

"I am by nature a man of strong affections. The love that I would have lavished on wife and children has been centered in a nephew, my brother's son. All my friends have been men, and this has sufficed till now. You cannot imagine what the love of a woman like Margaret Steyne would be to an empty-hearted, lonely man! Only to have loved her, without hope even, has brought into my heart such a wealth of joy as has changed my whole being. Life

has given me no such happiness as this hopeless loving has given me. It is my heaven, and—yes, my hell," he exclaimed bitterly, flinging out his hands in the intensity of his emotion. "I am in the uttermost deeps of torment when I remember that my love does not honor her; that it is a love she would scorn," he said brokenly; and laying his hands on the table, he dropped his head on them, and a choking sob shook his frame.

Miss Price was crying. She had never seen a strong man suffer, and it hurt her as the sight of no other suffering ever had done.

"Oh, do—do not—" she began appealingly, but what she would have said died away in a gasp; the words froze on her lips, and her eyes were stonily fixed and staring straight before her.

For Margaret had stepped through the door of the closet by the fireside into the room. Her face was deadly pale, and her eyes shone with a strange, luminous brightness. Swiftly and silently she came to Thorne's side, and, placing her hands on his bowed head, she stooped and laid her lips on them.

"God help us!" moaned Miss Price feebly.

At the touch of those soft fingers on his hair, and the gentle, mute caress, Thorne awoke as by an electric shock. He reached up and got hold of her two hands, and pressing her back from him, he rose to his feet and looked at her as one facing death; looked into her eyes as though he would see her soul. His heart beat fiercely, suffocatingly. He held her hands cruelly tight and did not know it. Margaret looked down at them.

"You hurt me," she said faintly.

"Forgive me;" and he held them gently but firmly. "Must I always hurt you, when heaven knows I would give my life to spare you pain?" His voice was low and clear, but so freighted with sadness that Miss Price could not bear it, and started to leave the room.

"Do not go, Rebecca," said Margaret; and Rebecca turned back and dropped into her seat; but she laid her face in her hands and did not again look toward them.

"You have heard, Margaret, what I would have spared you had I known. Oh, why did I not know that you were near me?" Thorne was saying, almost hopelessly impatient. "It was hard enough to feel that I had weakly sinned against you, but hardest of all to bear is the thought that you must suffer for my weakness. I deserve it all, my punishment, your scorn even, but you—it is too cruel; I cannot forgive myself, nor ask you to forgive me."

"Listen to me!" said Margaret; and through her sweet low voice there ran a vibrant note which thrilled to its depths the heart of the despairing man before her. In her clear, truthful eyes there shone a purpose, born of the deepest emotions of the human heart; and when such a purpose is born, then soul speaks to soul; there is no reserve. The selfish shams and trivialities of life are forgotten; they find no room for utterance; they are blotted out.

"Listen!" she said. "You shall not blame yourself so severely; you will not, when I have told you

that you have not sinned alone. If you have sinned in loving me, then too have I sinned; for I love you."

"Margaret!"

Wild astonishment, joy, unbelief, remorse, all struggled for utterance in that one word as it burst from the man's lips. Then he looked at her in silence, and felt as though his soul was trying to free itself from the body; that he was being hurled into chaos. But with an effort of his iron will, he plucked himself back to the firm ground of reason. He bent a little toward her, and there was again that strange impelling power in his eyes as they rested on hers which she had seen there once before.

"You are not letting your womanly sympathy for—for me make you say these things, are you?"

"Need you ask that?" she said quietly. "No, it is not that. It is in justice to you that I tell the truth and take away the sting you have suffered in thinking you had sinned against me. I could not let you go on thinking that, could I?"

"Yes, you could; but I shall forever thank God that you did not," he answered slowly, with a sigh of absolute joy. Then so low that only she heard, he said: "Thank you, my love!" and drawing her hands to his breast he pressed them against his fiercely beating heart, then released them. She went around to Miss Price, and kneeling down before her took hold of her hands.

"Rebecca, dear friend," she said in her soft clear voice, "I am sorry for you. You have loved me so well, and have thought me a stronger and better woman than I am. You must grieve to be disap-

pointed in me. But, dear, do not think I meant to be wicked, or that I shall be. We cannot always control our hearts. Love is too strong for us. I do not believe we can help that ; it is sometimes beyond us. I did not dream that I should love him. He was always kind, but no kinder to me than he was to you ; and I never knew how he felt, for he did not once let me see his heart. You know I have not cared much for the society of men, and have not seen much of them, else I might have been more careful ; and I did not know," she went on, "what my feelings toward him were until the day I refused Harris, and he blamed him, and swore such terrible vengeance against him. Then, as in a flash, I saw my own heart, and knew how blind I had been. It was as though I had been in a stupor, and had suddenly awaked. It was the discovery that I loved him, and the fear that harm would come to him from Harris through me, that made me ill."

Was ever man tried as Thorne was tried, when he must stand silent, and hear the woman he loved tell to another the story of her love for him—the story she could not tell to him ? The desire to go and gather her in his arms almost mastered him. It was only by a supreme effort of his strong will that he controlled himself, but he did, standing with head slightly bent toward the kneeling girl, that he might not miss a word she uttered or a tone of her voice.

"And you will not blame me too harshly," the sweet voice went on, "because I cannot look upon our love as a sin. It would be so did we let it control us now, or let it control our future ; but we will

not do that. We will both do what is right; and you will help us, will you not?"

"Who am I that I should judge either of you?" exclaimed Miss Price, leaning her face down on the bowed head of Margaret, while her tears fell fast upon the brown hair she so tenderly caressed. "I pity you both. I know you did not mean to do a wrong thing; but now that you have been strong enough to confess it, you will be strong enough to do what is right. I am not afraid," she said. "No, I am not afraid. May I go now, Margaret, and get some wood for the fire, and more lights? The fire is out, and the candles soon will be."

"Yes, go," said Margaret. "The room is cold. I feel chill;" and she shivered, as she rose to her feet.

Thorne went round to her.

"Let me take your hands in mine and warm them. You are not afraid of me now, are you? The barest acquaintance might do this much for you," he said sadly, and taking her small hands in his he chafed them gently. They were ice-cold, and she was trembling. He knew it was nervous excitement that chilled her. "Sit here," he said; and he put her in the large arm-chair. Bringing a rug from the settee, he wrapped her up and went out to find Miss Price, to get some wine.

Rebecca was standing aimlessly by the kitchen fireplace, but looked round at him. He went up to her and placed a hand on each of her shoulders.

"God bless you," he said in grateful, heartfelt tones. "If there were more women like you, there would be less sin in the world. I never can forget

your kindness to-night, and whatever you may think, I know you have done right. Now I want some wine for Margaret. She is cold from exhaustion, and if you can give her a cup of tea and a biscuit, it will be the best thing for her; this wine will do till then."

Miss Price went back with wood and lights, and when the fire had blazed up Margaret pronounced herself perfectly comfortable. She was dressed in a long loose gown of some soft red goods, which hung in classic folds about her slim lithe form. The rug had trailed off on the floor, and she looked in the great arm-chair like some fair, sweet creation of an artist's fancy, with her dainty wrists and round white throat showing against the crimson of her gown. Even Miss Price liked to look at her so, though her heart was sorely troubled. She started to leave the room, but turned and came back.

"Margaret, will you tell me where you were to-night when we came into the library? You were not in the room surely."

"No, I was not in the room; but I had not gone up to my sleeping room as you supposed;" and she told them of the secret room, and showed them the entrance through the closet. "I had gone up there, and the door being open, I heard your voices and was coming down, but as I was about to come into the room, I caught something of what you were saying; then I could not come on, and I could not go back. And I am glad I heard," she said quietly and with decision.

Miss Price was filled with surprise at the discovery of the secret room.

"Come," Margaret said, "and I will show you the room. It is only a bare place ; its secrecy is its charm."

"I would rather go some other time, if it's just the same to you," said Miss Price. "I don't like strange places at night, and Mr. Thorne has asked me for a cup of tea, and I haven't put on the kettle yet."

"Then you would better do it at once, and you need not come, but this will be Mr. Thorne's only opportunity, and I wish him to see it."

XX.

THE RENUNCIANTS.

"O well for them whose wills are strong!
They suffer, but they will not suffer long;
They suffer, but they cannot suffer wrong!"

MARGARET STEYNE stood at the foot of the secret stairway, the folds of her soft crimson gown gathered in one hand. The light from the candle which she held a little above her head, streaming over her, made a beautiful picture, and the heart of this man, hungrily covetous, yearned for this loveliness. Upon her face rested the pallor of the suddenly-revealed sorrow, making it more lily-like than ever in its delicacy and purity. As she ascended the winding stair, holding the candle a little backward to light him on his way, he realized with solemnity that this was truly typical of her soul's attitude toward him; as the candle, carried by her hand, lit the dark stairway, so was her soul to lead his beyond, and ever upward. Was it always to be like this? Was she ever to be a little beyond and above him? Was he never to walk step by step at her side?

Up in the silent room the candle, left there by Margaret earlier in the evening, still burned on the table, where some papers lay scattered over its scarred surface. And the gray wrap which she had also carried up lay on a chair and trailed on the floor, and these little touches of occupancy, with

the lights, lifted the room out of desolateness. Margaret noticed all this now, and was glad that it was so, for she wished Thorne to have a pleasant impression of the room, to carry in his memory.

It is one of the inexplicable conditions of the human heart that it is in the moments when sorrow has loosed its dark waters upon our souls, and the bitterness of death is in our hearts, that we are most painfully alive to the trivial things in our surroundings. A brand falls upon the hearth ; it does no harm, but it is carefully restored to its place. A book lies open at a certain chapter, and the title of that chapter is graven forever on memory's tablet.

Margaret placed the candle on the table, and they walked to the open window, which Thorne closed. They stood a moment looking about the room, and went back to the table.

"Are you fond of this place?" he asked.

"Yes, I have enjoyed the isolation I found here. But now I shall have the memory of you in this room, and I want to think of you as you look to-night."

Thorne did not speak ; he could not. He lifted the wrap from the chair and laid it across her shoulders ; but how he yearned to stoop and gather her in his arms, this humanly-human man ! Yet he did not, but sat down near her. She was his priestess.

There was an exaltation about her to-night. Every act, every word was fraught with the sacred impulses of a pure, womanly heart, but ah ! more precious than all else, of a heart that loved him,

and through which had been revealed to him the exquisite joy of perfect soul harmony. He knew that, whatever the future might bring him, during these few hours the heart of the woman he loved was governed by the same forces that controlled his; the impulse of their lives followed along the same plane; the invisible electric energy emanating from and surrounding his soul, had met and fused with hers, forming a perfect field. He felt each heart-throb vibrate between them. He looked into the sacred depths of her soul, and knew that no note of discord was there; knew that she would make no moan, as a weak woman would have done, for the confession which had been wrung from her. There would be no wail over the future. And what of himself? Margaret's soft voice brought him back to the present.

"I like the sound of the rain on the close roof," she was saying. "I had never been up here when it rained, and so I came to-night. There is something I want to tell you, but not now; when we have gone down from here will do."

"Yes, let us talk of ourselves," he said sadly. "We have but short grace. You said that you were glad you heard my confession; glad that the revelation had come about. Are you sure? And are you certain that you will feel so in the future? Think before you answer."

"I have no need to think. I am glad that it happened and—" meeting his eyes bravely—"I shall always be. It is better for us both; do you not see that it is? And I wonder if we could have helped it. I feel that some irresistible force has

dominated me through it all, struggle against it as I might; call it fate, destiny, or what you will, it is some force or law of nature I do not understand. I feel sure it has not been through any personal magnetism you have exercised over me. It has seemed apart from you; yet I have been impelled by it irresistibly toward this end."

"I know it," said Thorne. "I have been conscious of it myself; conscious of some strange, occult force, which I can no more satisfactorily define than you have done. But can you tell me when you first noticed this? Do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember. It was the day that Hagar brought me up to this room; the day that I went down in the hall with my cousin's box in my hands, and met you. You could not forget?"

"No, I could not forget," he said, "But go on, and tell me all that has happened to you, all that has been in your heart. It will be an inexpressible comfort to me in the future."

She began to speak in a soft, low voice. Her face had a strange introverted expression, as if she were scanning her own soul.

"It has seemed that events have shaped themselves to defeat my plans, hindering and baffling me in the things I would do, and that I have been compelled to submit. It was so to-night. I have not been quite happy of late," she said softly, "and I came up here to be alone and conquer myself. I never expected to see you again. I would have made almost any sacrifice to avert such a possibility; and while I sat here, trying to plan a future that would at least bring me occupation, if it did not

bring me forgetfulness, I heard your voice and went down ; and I do not believe I could help it."

The man did not speak, but waited with a stress of sympathetic tension on heart and brain until the low voice again broke the stillness of the old room.

"If I sinned in loving you,—which I cannot think, for sin must be voluntary,—I did not add to the wrong by confessing my love ; for it helped you and made it easier for me. We shall both be stronger to meet the future, now that we know, and we will not weakly let this sorrow dominate our lives or make us selfishly unmindful of the claims others have upon us."

There was a slight quiver of the voice as she ended. One of her hands lay on the table. Thorne reached out and laid his hand over it, and his voice was low and clear as he spoke :

"You have been divine, to me, to-night. You have comforted me and brought light and joy into my heart where all was darkness and bitterness. You heard my confession to Miss Price, yet you little know how hard I have struggled to keep from you all suspicion of my love, nor what I endured in conflict of mind and heart when again and again I was in some unexpected way thrown into your society through our business negotiations. That you should never suffer in any way for my weakness, I made the supreme test of the strength and unselfishness of my love ; but when Miss Price wrote as she did, I felt that I must see her and know what it meant, for her letter-writing is not as coherent as her talk. When I knew that you had heard my confession,

and I realized that in a moment of weakness I had done that which I believed would lose me your respect, your friendship,—for, when you came to me, I believed that you were acting from an impulse of compassion which must inevitably react upon yourself, and bring you suffering and regret,—I felt that I should go mad." Just for a moment the lids dropped over the dark eyes. "Then you saved me. Do you know what that means? You have shown me to-night the grandeur of womanhood. It was the supreme moment of my life. You will remember this if you are ever unhappy. Heaven grant my prayer that you may not be," he said fervently.

Miss Price spoke to them from the foot of the stairs; it was as a voice calling to them from another world. The rain beat down above them a sad requiem on this heart tragedy, but no music ever after would be so sweet to these two as rain on the roof. They went down the stairs in silence.

Miss Price, in the generosity of her sympathy, had done her best to tempt their appetites, but they sat by the daintily spread table in the light of the library fire, and in silence drank some tea.

The eyes of Thorne, screened by a shadow, shone with an exultant joy, despite their sadness. He was hoarding as a priceless treasure every tone of the voice of the woman he loved, each movement of the queenly head, every flutter of the small, expressive hands, and the droop of the dark lashes over the shining eyes. All this was stamped indelibly on his vision. He would in years to come see her as she looked to-night in this crimson gown,

with the delicate pallor of sadness on her sweet face.

"I have not yet told Mr. Thorne, Rebecca," Margaret at last said, turning to her friend, "what I found—what a revelation has come to us. If you will kindly bring it from the cabinet in my room, I will show it to him now."

While she was gone to bring the manuscript, Margaret told him of the finding of her cousin's story, and that the mystery of his unhappy life was a mystery no longer. "The story is an unspeakably sad one, but oh! how I have wished that I had discovered it before Harris came the last time! I should have known how to answer him, and he would have known also that you had not been my informant. He then could not have felt so bitter toward you."

"He was brutal to you, I know from all I've—from everything—" and Tom Thorne drew in his breath with a sharp, sibilant sound, while the hand which lay on the arm of his chair closed over it till the flesh showed white under the nails.

Miss Price put the manuscript in Margaret's lap.

"You see the story is not a short one," Margaret said, as she gave it to him. "But do not feel that you must read it hurriedly. These few hours are all that we have, the last we may expect to spend together. We have nothing to look forward to in the future. Let us not then abridge what we have to say to each other to-night."

Thorne thanked her with eloquent eyes, and a silence settled down upon the occupants of the library.

The tick of the clock in the hall came faintly through the door. The flame in the chimney grew shorter, moment by moment, died down, and the logs lay glowing red. Outside, the rain fell with a monotonous drone, and wandering drops of water, straggling down the wide chimney, struck on the hot embers with a little thud and hiss.

Rebecca Price, sitting bolt upright in her straight-backed chair, gazed lovingly at the back of Margaret's head, nodding her own with warm approval when her "dear girl" had made her brave renunciation of the future and all its possibilities. She was rejoicing, yet with a sorrowful gladness, for she felt that only in that one way lay safety and honor. But how the heart of the old maid yearned over these two, whom she loved so dearly; yearned with a tender pity that was heavenly.

Why should life be so hard for them? And why should this love have come to Margaret to bring sorrow upon her whole life? This thought grieved and perplexed her, yet she felt the existence of a strong consonance of nature between these two, the fitness of fatality in their love.

"Well, love is a strange thing," she mused. "I'm glad now that I missed it; it isn't safe to meddle with. It means so much, whether you love right or love wrong."

Margaret sat silently watching every change in that strong, dark countenance, as Thorne read the record of sorrow, perfidy, and remorse. Sympathy for Henry Steyne, and grief at the murder of his betrothed, spoke eloquently in his face; but when he came to the record of Caleb Harvey's perfidy to

his friend his eyes blazed with all a noble man's scorn of a cruel, cowardly act.

"The damned villain!" he burst out angrily.

"Amen!" responded Miss Price, with the spirit and decision of a grenadier.

He looked up a little guiltily. He had forgotten in his indignation where he was, but the unexpected and friendly support amused and assured him.

"Thank you," he said. "You are more than kind."

Margaret knew that Rebecca's sympathy with the epithet had been too spontaneous to be controlled. She smiled, and twisted her head around that she might see her face, and it was all she could do not to laugh, as her glance took in the determined cast of Rebecca's mouth, and the soldierly poise of the square shoulders. "Well," she mused, "Rebecca might feel that the skirts of her Puritanic faith had been draggled in the mire, but the heroic expression of those shoulders tell that there would be but a faint repentance." For many a tilt did the naturally warm heart of Miss Price, with its humanly human sympathies, run against the absorbed Puritan dogma of coldness and self-repression, and Margaret beheld this signal defeat of the dogma with unusual satisfaction.

Silence had fallen once more on the small group as the old timekeeper in the hall tolled out the hour of midnight.

Thorne did not again speak until he had completed the story of Henry Steyne's life, a story so full of sorrow, disappointment, regret, and remorse, that

it took a deep hold on him. He sat gazing into the fire, his thoughts busy with that past with which he was so closely, fatally connected through his marriage. Life is a tangled web, and he thought with a start of the threads they had searched for that rainy afternoon. "Ah! old sins have long shadows," he murmured, coming out of his gloomy reverie.

"It is unutterably sad," he said, turning from the silence and looking at Margaret. "Your cousin's whole life, at least after he went to New Orleans, seems to have been overshadowed by the tragedy. But it is almost beyond belief that a man should be such as Caleb Harvey has shown himself to be. He violated every principle of honor in dealing with his friends. All who came close to him suffered, but your cousin most of all."

"Yes, my cousin most of all; and he endured in silence; he was kind and gentle. There is nothing in his life but what must endear his memory to me. No stain of ugly memories clings to his name, or to this house through him, and I am grateful for that," said Margaret.

"Yes, it is pleasant to know that. Do you understand all you might from this page of the story?" asked Thorne, reaching a leaf from the manuscript across the table to her. It was the page that told how Marie Flemming, the heiress, had unwillingly broken off her marriage with Harvey, refusing to hear the entreaty of her mother's priest, and yielding only to the command of her guardian.

"Yes," she said, looking back at him. "I think I understand. You—you were—"

"Yes; I was the other man."

"And you did not know?"

"I was not permitted to know that she had not acted of her own free will," he said, with a sudden tightening of the lips.

"It was this that Harris meant when he said you had crossed his path?" said Margaret.

"Yes."

"I am afraid of him for you," she said with a little shudder. "He is so bitterly angry and vengeful. You know how he sacrificed my cousin, and he has not grown a better man with these years of constant evasion and deceit, but a worse one, and I am afraid for you," she repeated.

"Do not be; I can take care of myself," he returned assuringly.

But Margaret was insistent.

"You will be careless; you will go unarmed. You will not think of the kind of revenge he will be likely to take. Promise me, for my happiness' sake, that you will always be watchful. It is the only promise I ask of you."

The magnanimity of the girl touched him deeply.

"Ask as many promises as you wish; I grant them all, and will keep them if it be in the power of man to do it. Make no reservations with me," he exclaimed passionately. "My debt of gratitude will never be paid."

"I shall take comfort in remembering that you keep your promises," she said.

"Thank you. But I wonder if you have thought of it," he went on, "that, with this history of the tragedy in New Orleans and Harvey's subsequent life, you have him at your mercy. Let this story

be published in New Orleans or in Richmond, and he would be a ruined man."

"I do not believe that he will ever trouble me again," returned Margaret thoughtfully, "although he will not know that I have this story in my possession."

"Do not let him know it. Keep the knowledge of its existence confined to ourselves for the present," he urged. "It is much better all round that he should not know yet."

"I should like to make one reservation ; I should like Dr. W—— of New Orleans to read my cousin's story. It seems a duty to let him know the truth ; for he believed in him, proved it to all by his actions, which is the greatest thing one can do for a man who stands condemned by public sentiment ; greater than saving his life," said she warmly.

"Ah, do I not know how true that is? It is indeed the grandest thing man can do for his brother man. I see no reason," said Thorne, "why you should not make a copy of the story and send to Dr. W——. He would respect a request for silence."

"I am glad you think I might."

"Yes," he said, smiling faintly, "and I think you might make a copy for me, too, for I should like one to keep for reference ; and with the original and two copies, the story is sure to be preserved till it is wanted."

The clock struck the hour again. They rose, and Margaret stood on the wide hearthstone. Thorne walked the length of the room, and coming back stood beside her, on the spot where so many good-byes had been said, and so many tales of love told

and vows of constancy renewed. Many were the happy hearts that had basked in the brightness and warmth of the old fireplace, many the tears that had been shed in its glow. The spot was sacred with heart histories; and to-night was adding another to its tragic store. But the man and woman who stood there now did not think of this. They were counting by heart-beats the moments left to them.

It was the man's voice that broke the stillness.

"I want now to speak of our future. I must speak of that," he said. "You need not fear for me; you have made me strong, saved me; never forget that. I will not disappoint you or myself. I shall live as near right as I know, leaving no duty undone. My business now and for some time to come will require an active life, and I shall fill my hours with work."

As he talked there was in word and manner a suggestion of strength and reserve force that convinced his hearers that he would not fail to do a strong man's part in the world.

"I wish I could feel as sure of your future, dear," he said sadly. "It is for you I feel apprehensive. Your life here is so uneventful and monotonous, I am tortured by the fear that you will be unhappy. Oh, heaven! what wrong have I not done you!"

"Come back from the future," said Margaret courageously. "You have naught to do with that now," she said, looking into his eyes bravely. "You do wrong to measure the future from this unhappy moment in our lives. Few of us can look into the coming years with brave spirits; the mys-

terious and unfathomed future ever brings with it a feeling of insecurity and apprehension, almost awe. Why dwell upon it, then? I have had a long, blessed rest, and I shall find something to do for others that will fill my mind and time, and so take comfort in doing the duties of each day as they come to me, though the days be long.

"'Do not think that I shall meet them but with fears,
That for me life holds no promise, only tears.'"

she quoted, smiling faintly. "I have come to believe, too, in the divinity of circumstances. Ever after to-night I shall rest in the certainty that my life will not be governed by my puny will; that my plans will not avail. The fate which has so strangely ruled and ordered my life so far, will do so still, and I shall not be unhappy."

"You are brave," he said with enthusiasm, his face lighting. "It makes it less hard for me to go —and I must; I have been merciless to you to-night."

Going over to Miss Price and holding out his hand he said: "I am wondering if you can know the comfort it is to me that Margaret has you, and that you will be her friend for life—and mine. It is this knowledge which makes it possible for me to say good-bye. I am grateful for all your goodness to us."

Turning, he went back to where Margaret stood and took her hand in his.

"We feel that it is a cruel fate that separates us, and wonder why it is ours, but we bow to its decree. It cannot be otherwise. You, in your sweet wo-

manliness, have been divine to me. I will never make you regret it. And God forbid any ill to you, my love," he said, finishing the last words under his breath; and crushing her hands in his he turned and went out of the room.

Margaret Steyne stood motionless. When the hall door closed upon the man she loved, she shivered as though it had shut out her heart. She felt numbed and stupid. Her physical strength was leaving her now, yet in this moment some lines which she had read struggled across her mind. Yes, that is it, she murmured.

> "In your life may love and sweetness linger yet;
> And for me, O Father, help me to forget!"

"Yes, it must be so—to forget," she murmured; and taking the candle which Miss Price lighted for her, she followed her faithful friend in silence up the broad stair, her feet dragging heavily from step to step.

XXI.

THE SHADOW ON THE HALF-WINDOW.

THE old city of Richmond lay wrapt in peaceful slumber, its quiet no longer disturbed by the ceaseless tramp of armed sentinels. No sound of musketry hurtled through its narrow streets in the silent hours of the night, waking a thousand echoes to the ears of the startled inhabitants. The rumble of the ambulance had ceased to be a familiar sound, and would now have been an event of interest. All this had gone out with the disbanding of the two armies. And the old place, with much of the vigor throttled out of it, had gathered its robes of civil and official dignity about it, and, with a quiet unspoken acceptance of things, was adjusting itself to the new phase of life with a resolute courage that must bring its reward.

It was midnight and late autumn. A high wind blowing from out the west swept down the street, tearing at casement and shutter as it rollicked in an abandon of mad mirth, only to sob and moan the next moment like some lost spirit as it slips away through the dark and narrow byways. Save for these voices of the wind the street was silent; and densely dark but for a square of light which came through a half-window in the second story of the Bassett Block, piercing as a living eye the dark-

ness, which was made the darker by it. In this square of light the shadow of a man's head and shoulders fell, immovable as a statue, while hour after hour went by. The clock in the old court-house tower tolled the hour of two, three ; and still the silent figure moved not. Not till the gray dawn crept softly over the earth did the light within grow pale and the eerie-looking head fade from the window.

The old chore-man, as he wended his way up the hill to the courthouse, the rooms of which he made ready for the honorable judges, saw the pale gleam from the window mixing with the gray morning, and stopped conscientiously.

"Wonder what Lawyer Harris is a-doin', up so airly. Must hev a big case a-comin' on, an' he's doin' a lot o' thinkin', I spose," soliloquized the old man.

The old chore-man was right in part. Lawyer Harris had been thinking throughout the whole night. Bnt he was not thinking of a case that was to come before the courts. No, with the force of his indomitable will, backed by all his knowledge of law and human nature, the lawyer was bending his energies to the ruin of a fellow-man. His humiliation at Margaret Steyne's rejection and scorn of him had been so poignant that time had not lessened the hurt. Nor had time lessened his hatred of the man whom he blamed for his defeat. It had but whetted his desire for revenge to a keener edge.

Strangely enough Harris passed over Margaret's part in his humiliation as something for which she was not to be held responsible. Every minor feeling was swallowed up in his hatred of Thorne.

Every other passion paled beside the rage in his heart against him. He it was who should feel his power to the inmost fiber of his heart.

For weeks the lawyer had been shaping his business affairs to the end that he might be able to command his time. At last he was in a fair way to accomplish his purpose. He had sold a half-interest in his law business to a brother attorney, who would relieve him of most of the responsibility of his practice. He grew furious as he remembered the plans he had made only a short time ago. But they were past; he would not retrospect. He would get even. "'He laughs best who laughs last.' And he who laughs at all, does well," he added, with a curse.

While Caleb Harvey had been arranging his law business, he had given his whole mind to the work. The demon of hate and revenge he sternly throttled into silence for the time, and all his plans of vengeance he held in abeyance. Now he was free. He would leave Richmond, but he would return; and he laughed aloud, but it was not a mirthful laugh.

He rose and blew out the light, and knew for the first time that a new day had come, He drew up the shade. A robin was singing his morning réveille in the half-leafless branches of the poplar tree before the window. The old Spaniard who for more years than the lawyer could remember had kept the little coffee-house which stood diagonally across the street, was sweeping the patch of uneven brick walk in front of his door, the large gold hoops in his ears glistening in the pale light as they swung against his swarthy skin. Down the street came

the shrill voice of the newsboy crying his morning papers.

"'Er's yer mawnin' paper, all about the fiah and de murder;" for the little paper boy felt as proud this morning in his small way as did the editor in his larger way, that he had so much to offer his patrons.

The lawyer met the boy as he came to his door, and taking his paper went across to the old Spaniard's coffee-house and asked for a cup of strong coffee, which he sipped as he read. There had been a fire in the outskirts of the city, and a murder had been committed; a stranger from the North had been found fatally stabbed. Turning to the railway time-table, the lawyer studied it with more interest than he had yet shown. Over the departure of trains going North he spent some time.

He was gone an age, it seemed to the red-headed office boy, who, rooted to the doorstep motionless as a tobacconist's sign, watched anxiously for the lawyer's return. He was burdened with a piece of wonderful intelligence which he hastened to communicate, with excited mien and blundering speech.

"A man has been murder'd—putty nigh cut to pieces; he is at the 'orspital, an' they want ye to go to the 'orspital right away."

"What do they want me for?" demanded Harris sharply. "Mr. Porter will be here in five minutes;" and he glanced at his watch.

"He hain't dead yit, the man hain't, an' he wants to tell somethin' as hes to be writ down. The perliceman waited here for ye a bit; yes, 'twer a right

smart spell he waited, an' he tole me a lot about it."

The lawyer felt comfortable with his cigar between his lips, and had no intention of changing his present ease for a disagreeable duty. Instead, he fell to studying his office boy speculatively, for the first time in his life regarding him in his individual character. He had been to him heretofore but a piece of animated mechanism, with certain duties to perform at certain periods of time.

"Do you think you would like to be a lawyer some time?" he asked the boy.

"I don't know 'bout that fer certain, sir," the boy answered slowly, with his face screwed into a thoughtful frown expressive of severe mental effort. "But I'd like to be a perliceman, and ketch murders, an' see men when they's all cut up," he declared with animation.

"Heavens, boy! Are you sure you wouldn't like to cut them up yourself?"

"No, sir; no, I'm sure I wouldn't do it fer nothin'. But I'd like to see this man. Ye see, he is a North man, an' he was goin' up a ways to work wid a man as is surveyin' a railroad, a-goin' to work fer his old master what is a-doin' the job, an' he got in wid a lot of bad fellows—"

But the lawyer heard no more of what his office boy was saying. His mind was working like a telegraphic ticker; it had been set in motion by the words "going to work with a surveying party that was laying out a railroad, going to work for his old master."

What other road was being laid out in that part

of Virginia but the one that Tom Thorne was managing? Think hard and fast as he might, he could think of no other. Yet there might be; and he blamed his indifference to such things for his lack of definite knowledge now. It was a chance, and he was gathering paper, pen, and ink in his hands as he spoke.

"I am going to the hospital," he said to the boy, "and you may come with me if you will not speak; come!" And he was off, the office slave following in his wake, in such a maze of surprise and delight that he had gone a block before he remembered to close his mouth, which had flown open with the unexpected permission, or thought to put his hat on his head, carrying it by his side as a school-boy his lunch-basket.

On a cot in the charity ward of the Mercy Hospital lay the wounded man, who had been picked up insensible from the street some hours before. A nurse was administering restoratives. They had not thought that he would recover consciousness, but he had, and the authorities wanted his statement.

The man was very weak, but rational. He was a Scotchman, from a town in southern Pennsylvania, and was going on beyond Walsingham to work for Mr. Thorne; had worked for him a long time.

Harris recorded for the police all the information the man could give. Then he turned them all out of the room, and talked to the man as the friend of Thompson Thorne, whom this poor man loved and honored. The words which the suffering man uttered were few, but, few and feeble as they were,

they brought a wild, fiendish joy into the heart of the lawyer. He turned his head away, that the dying man might not see his face, and signaling the nurse, went out.

Once again Lawyer Harris visited the little coffee-house of the old Spaniard ; it was still early morning, before the business of the day had begun. Again he drank his cup of strong coffee at a little table, and when he had finished he called the old Spaniard by name :

"Paola."

"Si, señor," the old Spaniard replied, falling into his native tongue, in his surprise at being addressed so abruptly, and bowing low before the great lawyer who honored him by drinking his coffee at his little table.

"I am going out of the city for a short time. I want this paper sent every day to a friend. Will you do this for me ?"

The old man still bowed vaguely, not comprehending what was required of him.

"The boy will leave the paper here each morning ; you will wrap it up so ;" and taking a roll of stamped wrappers from his pocket he folded one. "Then you go over there and put it in that mail-box. Can you do this and not talk about it ?"

"Excellenza, it is my pleasure to serve you," the old man protested humbly. "I hear, I obey ;" and his small black eyes twinkled with enjoyment at the suspicion of a secret. With a Spaniard the love of intrigue endures forever ; it is an inextinguishable trait of his character.

"That is well. Here are a number of wrappers.

I will address them ; you have only to roll up the paper and mail it as I have told you," said the lawyer.

Then he took his pen from his pocket and wrote across the face of each wrapper, "Caleb R. Harvey." He shivered as he looked at the name. He could not help it ; he felt as one who had thought he had buried an old sorrow, when from some hidden corner in his life it suddenly confronts him, and he knows that it had never been dead. Had Lawyer Harris been less determined he would have abandoned his plan. A weaker man would have done so. He was not a weak man, and he finished addressing the wrappers, and gave them to the Spaniard with a banknote.

That night, when the Northern express went out, Lawyer Harris was one of the passengers.

XXII.

NEW NEIGHBORS.

THE new house had long been completed, the new family long settled cozily therein, and the Steyne House ladies had neighbors. For Mrs. Morgan, of whom they had hoped so much, had not proved disappointing. She was intelligent, refined, affable, and agreeable in manner, and about Margaret's age, and the two ladies soon settled down into a neighborly friendliness which was to prove pleasant and helpful to both. In person Mrs. Morgan was tall and slender, with slow, graceful movements, with soft white skin and golden-red hair which fluffed prettily at the sides, and shone like a halo in the sun. She had clear gray eyes, and a low, musical voice which she dragged after her when she talked. She was pretty, amiable, and indolent—yes, and happy, Margaret decided, with a negative sort of happiness due to her youth and indolence, which would not let her trouble about things; and worry just slipped away from her.

Yet Isabel Morgan was not a weak woman. Beneath her careless manner there slumbered a latent strength of character which, under some strong motive for action, would develop a force unsuspected by those who judged her from the surface. Such natures, when aroused, are tenfold more intense than those whom little things excite.

Mr. Morgan was rich in character distinctively different from that of his wife, if such difference be thought fortunate or desirable. He was large and robust, with a boyish enthusiasm of manner amounting almost to coarseness ; a man of strong passions and impulses. Such men are not self-controlled. They sin, and are quick to repent ; but as quick to forget their repentance. He was fond of his wife, and lavish in all that pertained to her comfort. But there could be no sympathy of mind and thought ; she must stand alone there. Why she had chosen this soul isolation, this mental Sahara, was a matter of wonder to those who knew her best.

Altogether this marriage was as great a puzzle to the two inmates of Steyne House, in their larger and broader way of viewing life, as it was to Miss Abigail Borden, Mr. Morgan's aunt, who was a member of the Morgan household. Aunt Abby, as she was called, was an active little person ; one of those women whom George Eliot designates as "a snapper-up of unconsidered moments." Yet, notwithstanding Miss Abigail's energy and industry—her "thoroughgoingness" her nephew called it—she was indulgent to his wife ; far more considerate than one could have believed possible, for no two women could be more unlike.

Her nephew's choice of a wife had been a never-ending puzzle to her, and time brought no solution of the mystery. But she had come to the point of not thinking much about it, accepting her niece as she did the parts of her Bible which she did not understand—as being there for some good purpose.

Withal, the Morgan household was an interesting and harmonious one. The new business, with its plans and the pleasant bustle attending, held an interest for them all, and the two families were much together.

Moreover, there is an initial stage in acquaintanceship which possesses its own peculiar charm. To two people who possess the elements of a real friendship, as well as the camaraderie of the moment, this stage will be short, but it will be fascinating while it lasts. It is a period when we know not how our new comrade will look at a certain thing, and from what point of view he will reason in a discussion. We shall fancy we know, and the uncertainty is an element of interest ; we think about it. His views, his thoughts, his expressions are new ; their freshness and novelty please us. He is an unread story which we study, and rare flashes of insight we catch which charm while they lightly bewilder.

Is this brief, evanescent stage the best of the average friendship? Well, it may be to some natures. But when we have slipped past the point of speculation, of uncertainty, and come to know that we shall meet a sympathetic response to our mood, let us approach as we may—when we have the joy of feeling that we are understood in our best potentialities—then have we found the highest joy of companionship.

It was to this point that Margaret and Mrs. Morgan had come. They were friends, and their friendship had only to do with the present and the future, whatever that might bring. The past pressed not upon the present. They began where they found

each other, and were satisfied, rarely a day passing that they did not meet, that they did not sit under the old beech tree ; it was their trysting-place, where they met to talk and read. Even when the brown leaves lay thick on the ground, and the early winter wind soughed drearily through the half-bare tops of the trees, they did not give over meeting there, for Margaret at this period of her life was happiest when out on the open hill, with nothing between her and the moody, changeful sky ; and Isabel Morgan made her friend's mood her own.

It was on a Sabbath day. The early morning frost had gone out of the air with the coming of the sunshine, and midday found it pleasant on the hill-side, where Margaret with Miss Price and Mrs. Morgan lingered to talk. They had been down to Walsingham to attend service at the little stone chapel, to which a wandering rector came once in a while to conduct services in a primitive way. It was at best a forlorn attempt at holding service, and the three women had been impressed with the great need of some form of regular weekly service in the place, and were discussing the question quite earnestly. They had come to where their paths separated. The way to Steyne House lay straight on up the hill, while the other, which the natives called the "side-hill path," wound round the lower half of the elevation to the Morgan home.

Mrs. Morgan was urging Margaret to walk home with her to dinner and spend the afternoon, when they would discuss the matter further. Or she would be willing, she declared, to consider any of the numerous schemes in which Margaret was in-

terested, even to agreeing to Christmas festivities for the poor children of Walsingham, so it but insured her the companionship of her friend for the day ; and Margaret yielded.

Miss Price declined ; she would not be tempted from her accustomed duties, saying that she would "go home and see to things."

"Which means your poultry, does it not ?" asked Mrs. Morgan pleasantly.

"Not exactly ; at least my poultry are not the only things that need seeing after. From the look in Axem's eyes this morning, I don't reckon Hagar is having the most peaceful time while we are away. There was just enough white showing to mean mischief."

"And if a skirmish is on, Axem's sure to have all the amusement," laughed Margaret.

"Axem is an odd little creature," said Mrs. Morgan ; "so droll and impish that you are amused in spite of yourself."

"Yes, and her wickedness is the more amusing because it is original sin. She does nothing like other people," said Margaret. "But send her down with Rolfe to go home with me before sunset, Rebecca." And the two young women turned and went by the side-hill path, while Miss Price kept her way on up the hill.

There was a look of content on the grave face of Rebecca Price. She was more glad each day that Margaret had a woman friend of her own age, and such a friend as Isabel Morgan, who, she felt, would interest herself in whatever work Margaret might undertake ; for Margaret was seriously contemplat-

ing the establishment of a school for Walsingham, and in its initial stages many difficulties would have to be overcome. With Mrs. Morgan interested, they would have the practical advice and help of Mr. Morgan, who would give them "to please Belle." And Rebecca had come to think that a woman should have a man's strength and business experience between her and the world.

"Mr. Thorne was right," she mused. "No woman should be utterly alone in this cold, selfish world. 'For,' as he said, 'to succeed in the world's ways of business one must both endure and be aggressive; a woman might endure, but she could not be aggressive.'" With the remembrance of these words came thoughts of her absent friend. She sighed, and a shadow lay in the calm gray eyes, and went with her on her solitary walk up the path which was so full of memories of him. And there was so much to remember; so much that was pleasant, so much that was painful. But was all the sorrow that had come upon Thorne and Margaret for some purpose? Was it a part of their life plan from which they could not escape? And was good to come of it after all?

Thus the heart of Rebecca Price questioned, and it questioned itself into the belief that this was true; and a measure of comfort to which she had long been a stranger took up its abode in her heart.

"How grateful, how worshipful we should be," she murmured, "that a higher power rules and decides the destinies of all mankind! Just to feel that there is some Power above and beyond us,

which is wiser and stronger than we, is comforting past everything."

"Past everything!" Each heart will echo the words, for we may be courageous, we may be strong, yet the strongest of us must sometimes stand shivering and despairing, doubting our own strength. We put our hands out weakly, only to find darkness before and about us. And to feel that there was no strength, no wisdom, no mercy, beyond our own, would shake to its foundations the bravest soul that ever lived. Say what you will, it is only a faith in something outside of ourselves, something stronger and better, that saves women from despair and men from madness.

XXIII.

DO THE DEAD LIVE AGAIN?

THE slumberous haze of a late Indian summer lay upon the hills of southern Pennsylvania. Into the valleys the golden sunshine sent its rays through blue mists. The scent of dead leaves was in the air, and the woodsy fragrance which belongs only to that short, perfect season seemed a part of the sweetness and stillness which falls upon the earth like a benison from nature's heart.

In the bend of the lazy, shining river nestled the old town of L——, glorified yet subdued by the hazy splendor of the season, half girdled by the high hills which seemed shouldering against the sky. The scene looked as a creation of an old painter's might look, mellowed by time.

So thought a stranger who had alighted from the midday train, and stood looking leisurely about him. The driver of a smart-looking private trap left his horse's head and came up and touched his hat.

"A trap for the gentleman expected at the Aubrey, sir."

"All right. I shall be ready presently," the stranger replied, and he continued his desultory study of the old town.

When the bustling station was almost deserted, and the last carriage had departed, he entered the dogcart and was driven to the Hotel Aubrey, where

he was soon established in most luxurious apartments. Across the hotel register he had written "C. R. Harvey, New York City."

When Caleb Harvey had made himself comfortable, a messenger was sent to the postoffice for his mail; and, sitting at his ease in his room, he opened and read the papers he received with almost as much pleasure as the old Spaniard Paola had sent them. He read with peculiar enjoyment the notice of his trip to New York on legal business which would detain him for some time. He had stopped in New York four days, and had left orders about his mail, which would be limited to the daily paper and a chance letter from his partner, to whom he had said when parting:

"Don't send me any bothering letters from clients;" adding not too graciously, "and don't write yourself unless you have to; I don't want to hear anything about business that is not absolutely necessary."

"I understand," his partner had said, smiling; "you want a change."

"Yes, that is what I am going away for, and I intend to have it."

It was a fashionable company that filled the dining-room of the Aubrey at the one o'clock luncheon that day. Most of the guests were in their places when the lawyer entered and walked slowly across the room to the place assigned him.

He was well dressed, even to fastidiousness, the dark suit he wore being of the most fashionable make. He had never appeared to better advantage. You would have said that he was not a day over

thirty-seven, and many curious glances followed the distinguished-looking stranger, who was not seated among the transient guests, but was escorted to the end of the room reserved for the resident guests.

One pair of dark, startled eyes looked up at him and followed him the length of the room. When he had faced about and seated himself, a pallor overspread the dark-brunette face of the woman. Her lips became pale and tremulous, and her hand shook as she raised a glass of water to her lips, in vain effort to hide her agitation.

"Do the dead come to life?" she moaned under her breath, and a hand seemed closing on her throat. She merely pretended to eat. The meal was nearly over before the woman's boy companion, rousing to a sense of her distraught manner and untouched luncheon, exclaimed:

"Why, good gracious! Aunt Marie, what's the matter? You are not eating your lunch, and you said you were hungry; and you are as white as—as anything. You are ill," he persisted.

"No; please be still, Ned, and don't mind about me. I am all right now." The words were strangely low and patient for her; the courage seemed to have gone out of her voice. "Don't speak now, for there come the Careys," she warned.

But Ned Thorne, always noted for his conversational gymnastics, had tacked, and was off on a new topic.

"We had a letter from Uncle Thorne up at the office to-day; just a business scratch. Everything appears to be going tip-top down there. Wish I

could have been with him this summer. It must be jolly nice camping out. He says that when the boys pitch their tents they stretch a rope, made of horsehair, don't you know, round them close to the ground, to keep the snakes out. Isn't that a queer notion?"

"Yes, it is," she replied, "but I don't see how that would prevent."

"Why, you see, the ropes are all rough and endy, and a snake can't crawl over them, nor touch them. It's what the people up here would call a 'cute trick.' I would like to try living in a tent awhile, but Uncle Thorne wants me worse to stay here, so you won't be lonely, and—well, you will have me this year anyway."

The woman's pale face flushed slightly under the frank boyish gaze and the innocent words of her young companion, and she looked away, as she said softly, "And next year too, I hope." For Marie Thorne, frivolous and vain as she was, in her own selfish way was fond of this boy, her husband's nephew, who had come two years before to make his home with them. He was but seventeen now; not old enough to have left off his enthusiastic boyish manner and speech; just a trusting, trustful, heartsome boy. His aunt was glad now of his talk, and made an effort to be responsive. She found herself always making an effort to listen patiently when the boy talked of his uncle.

"Have you given up boating?" she asked. "I do not hear so much about it now as I did a while back."

She was making a determined effort to pull her-

self out of the shock she had received, and to that end was encouraging the boy to talk.

"No," he returned. "I have not wanted to give it up, but there's been a lot of extra work lately, and I wanted to put in full hours at the office till that was done. I can go on again at the afternoon pull pretty soon now."

"I had not supposed that your—that they were so strict with you as that," she said.

"They aren't hard on me. Uncle Thorne is so good to me that he wouldn't say a word, though he does seem to know what's going on inside of a fellow; but I'm no shirk. We are going to have some glorious evenings while this moon lasts, if the weather holds. The boys want me to go down to Dingly Point with the boat this evening. We'll start after dinner and come home by moonlight. Will you mind?"

"No, I shan't mind," she said. She was grateful to the boy for his unheeding chatter, though there was a little impatience in her heart that he would so persistently drag his uncle's name into their conversation.

But nothing that he might do or say would for a moment drive from her the awful consciousness that this stranger who had walked into the dining-room, and who was sitting not twenty feet away from her —that this man was Caleb Harvey, the lover of her girlhood, almost husband. And she had believed him dead long, long years, and all this time some marvelous error had prevailed. Why had he not denied the false report? He must have known of it, must have heard from home in all that time, or have

seen some one who knew him. Anyone from New Orleans would have told him ; they would have done so in the surprise of the moment at seeing him alive. He had changed so little, there could not be the slightest doubt of his identity in the mind of any who had ever known him.

Caleb Harvey was clean-shaven now. Mrs. Thorne herself might have been puzzled had she met him before he left Richmond.

Where had he been in the time since he left New Orleans? What strange chance had brought him here?

Thus Marie Thorne's mind went from point to point, traveling swiftly, in speculative fancy, yet coming up each time against the blank wall of fact, the fact of his being alive, and of his presence there. Mystified, and wearied by her efforts to control her emotions, she was glad when she could leave the room, and she went with the belief that Harvey had not seen her.

But Harvey was aware of Mrs. Thorne's presence at luncheon. He saw her directly he took his seat ; and without seeming to do so had watched furtively her face, which he remembered had always faithfully mirrored the emotions and impulses of her uncontrolled nature. Now her startled glance, her surprise and pallor, all told him that he was recognized, and told him, too, that she could have had no suspicion of the truth ; she had believed him dead. It was the same changeful, speaking face ; a little older and thinner, and a trifle pale, with a worn look about the eyes, but a pretty face still.

Caleb Harvey did not make much of his meal, for

the sight of this woman who had been the love of his youth had stirred the deeps of his heart, and memories which had lain buried long years in the ashes of forgetfulness sprang to life and rushed through heart and brain, a fast-hurrying, overpowering host. His heart quickened to a faster beat; he had never been less master of himself. Not since he had coldly put his past behind him had he been so moved. He quitted the house, and sought seclusion in the quiet park which joined the hotel.

It was not a faded sentimentalism that had taken possession of Harvey. But memories of his home, his kindred, his friends had stolen ghostlike upon him from out the past, and wound their phantom arms about him, refusing to be loosed. It was as though he stood apart and looked at his own soul, but it was the soul of his lost youth. He had the consciousness that there were two of him, two separate and distinct beings. Which was he, the worldly middle-aged man or the thoughtless, yes, reckless and recklessly happy youth? It was as if the veil which had shut out his past life had been rent asunder, and that life loomed with skeleton-like distinctness before him. The strong fortress of reserve and self-repression within which he had entrenched himself was beaten down by this invisible host. He was swayed like a woman.

Had those twenty years of stern discipline, that eternity of self-denial and self-immolation been for naught? Was he still a weak fool? he asked himself fiercely.

The afternoon was well gone, and the sun was throwing long shadows over the dead, brown leaves,

when Harvey returned to the hotel parlor. It was not the boy who returned. His spirit-memory had lingered lovingly, entreatingly near, but at last had gone patiently back to that shadowy world whence it had come. It was the calculating, relentless man of the world who sent his card to Mrs. Thorne, and not a tremor shook his pulse as he went forward to meet her when she entered the room.

The woman was not so self-possessed. There was this difference: The man was meeting a woman to whom he was indifferent now, except that she was Tom Thorne's wife; while she was meeting one whose memory she had always kept in her heart. In the long ago of youth she had loved Caleb Harvey as well as one of her selfish, variable temperament could love. She would never have dismissed him had it not been that her guardian had absolute control of her fortune, and without his consent she would be penniless. So she gave up her lover, but she never forgot him.

There are certain weak natures, with small intelligence and narrow sympathies, that do not forget. They cling tenaciously, stubbornly, to a past memory or passion, not from a strength born of duty, or consistency even, for it may have proved itself base, but simply because they had it; it was theirs. And it is easier to weakly remember than to force out the unhealthy sentiment. Who can reason with the unreason of weakness? Through all the years of her married life, Marie Thorne had given more love and loyalty to the memory of this man whom she had once loved, and whom she thought dead, than she had to the noble man whose wife she was.

Yet there was a shock to her in this sudden embodiment of her idealistic love. A slight sinking of the heart, a vague sense of loss and disappointment, weighed upon her mind which she could not define, else she would have known that she was not prepared to banish the romantic sentiment which clung to a lost love that for years she had secretly cherished; to sink the ideal lover of memory into the commonplace of the real, visible man; a man, too, who could be nothing to her, who might not even be her friend; who might not have forgiven her. With these thoughts flaming themselves in a faint color on cheek and brow, she came forward and gave him her hand.

"This is the surprise of my life," she said hesitatingly. "I—we all thought——"

"I know," he interposed, not letting her finish what must be awkward for her to say; "you thought I was dead. Well, I was dead to the friends of my youth, to all that life held dear—and what did it matter?"

They stood silent for a moment before she spoke again.

"You knew, then; you heard the report?"

"Yes, I heard the report," he replied; "but I would not correct it. It was as well so."

"Do you still feel that way about it?" she asked presently.

"That it does not matter?" he asked.

"Yes; that you do not care."

"Yes; I have not changed. I thought it all out then, and I am still willing to abide by my decision."

His companion did not reply, but looked at him,

and obeying a sudden impulse led the way to a seat near the window. The black-lace gown which she wore, with the dark-red roses at her throat, well became her brunette beauty. Marie Thorne had always understood how to dress. To-day she was pale and nervous, and did not find it easy to talk. The light was not merciful to her now, as she faced it. Short lines showed underneath the eyes and on the temples. She was looking thin and haggard, her companion thought, and a trifle blasé. He was pitiless ; he saw evidence in her face of the aimless, frivolous life she had led. Still, she was yet what would be called a handsome woman — dashing, perhaps ; her eyes were bright and just a little daring.

Why did the lawyer think of Margaret Steyne's pure, fearless eyes ?

Then Mrs. Thorne smiled at some one who passed the window. Her mouth had still the same sweet curve he remembered so well. It was the first time she had smiled, and it pleased him. The youth, whose appearance had called the smile into the dark, changeful face, went on down the path leading to the river, his slight, boyish figure showing firm and graceful in his sculling suit of white and green.

"It is Ned," she said, bringing her eyes back to the face of her companion. "I promised to see him off. Would you like to go with me ? It is not far to the river."

He would like to go, he said ; it would be pleasant. And she thought he was pleased that she had proposed it.

"Get a scarf or something for your throat; it may be chilly out there presently," Harvey said.

He waited until she came from her room with a long black wrap on her arm, the ribbons of which trailed lightly over the brown leaves as she walked. The cloak, with its crimson-lined hood, was an harmonious continuation of the black-lace gown and scarlet roses, and the effect was fine, the result all that could have been aimed at.

As they came on to the bluff above, the boat was pushing off, and it was but a glimpse they got of a bonnie brown face turned up to them in greeting. Harvey was startled by the resemblance to Tom Thorne, the man whom he hated above all others.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Ned Thorne; Tom's nephew," she answered. "His home is in New Orleans. He is with us temporarily in the office learning business."

Harvey was glad that this boy was the only one who had seen fit to take up a residence in L——. He wanted no one about who would interfere with his plans. "This boy doesn't count."

They stood in the mellow, hazy light, and watched the boat until it disappeared behind a bend in the river.

"Will you stay here awhile?" asked Harvey. "You will not suffer from the chill off the water?"

"No, I shall not feel it;" and Marie Thorne glanced down at her wrap. She wondered if he had had it in his mind to ask her to do this when he suggested that she bring it.

"Then we will sit here on this old boat," he said; and silence fell between them. If Caleb Harvey

had anything to say to his companion he was not eager to begin.

It was a quiet, peaceful scene. The water crept lazily by. No sound broke the stillness save the laughter of some children which floated up from the beach. They were at play with a boat, which was riding at its rope's end. It was not a beautiful boat, such as the tall, slim lads had rowed away in, but a plain, matter-of-fact boat, large enough, strong and ugly enough, to be useful.

There were two boys and a little dumpling of a girl in a blue pinafore, and they played at beaching the boat. The largest, a bare-legged little fellow, chunky and square of build, waded in the water, and putting his small shoulder to the stern of the boat, pushed manlike. The smaller boy strained on the rope at the prow, while the little tot of a girl, more willing than wise, hung on to his home-made suspenders, and backed sturdily up the stone landing-place, only by careful effort being able to keep out of the way of her brother as he crowded on her. At last a merry shout from the little toilers proclaimed a victory; they had beached the boat, and just as their father had come up to see them do it.

The two people sitting on the old upturned boat smiled, as did the father, when he saw what a small bit of the prow touched the dry sand. He was a weary-faced man, the father, with a stoop in his shoulders; he had the look of one who had found life hard, but it had not hardened him. His clothing was patched. He patted the tousled heads of the boys, and swung the baby girl up into the hol-

low of his arm with an awkward caressing movement pleasant to see, and kissed her lovingly as he placed her in the boat.

The boat had gone away with its happy freight. The faint dip of the oars in the distance, the lapping of the water on the gray stones under the low bluff where they sat, were the only sounds that broke the quiet of approaching evening.

The woman was the first to break the silence.

"I can but wonder, Mr. Harvey, at the strange chance that brought you here to L——," she said, "and that you happened to discover me."

He looked at her as he replied quietly :

"It was not chance. I knew that you were here, and I came on purpose to see you."

Mrs. Thorne turned a searching look on him. "Why did you do it?" she asked presently.

"Why did I do it?" he questioned a little savagely ; but his tone changed to sadness as he went on. He spoke earnestly, as one who had a purpose : "Is it strange that a man should long for something out of his past life? Could no such longing enter your heart? Has no such reaching back over the past years ever come to you?"

He saw her shiver and the tears spring to her eyes, and his heart stirred at the sight as it had not done in years. She put up her hand and drew the crimson hood over her hair, but did not look toward him, nor speak.

"Do we ever," he went on gently, "get away from or forget the lives once lived?"

"No," she replied slowly, turning a little and looking past him as she spoke, "we cannot forget.

Our past is ours; do what we may it will not be shut away. It is ours."

"You have spoken truly," he returned; "it will not be shut away. The chambers of memory are forever haunted by it. We never cease to long for the companionship of those we have known in a happy past. Should then the heart always ache, the ear always wait for the sound of a familiar voice, the eye weary with watching for the sight of a face that belonged to that past? When we have repented, should we still suffer, still be punished? Heaven forbid!"

Marie Thorne's eyes still followed the river down its shining length. She was a little startled by the strength of the man's words. She had not thought that he would feel so deeply, nor that he would speak as he was speaking.

"Why did you come to me?" she asked.

"Why did I come to you? There was no one else to whom I could go. No one. It is not long since I discovered that you were here, or I might have come before. I felt that of all the friends of my youth, you were the one whom I could most surely trust to respect my desire, for I shall never return to my native state, never make myself known. And I know you will believe me when I tell you that there is no reason why I cannot go back, only that I do not now wish to. The time was when the longing was almost unendurable, but I had determined not to yield, and I did not."

"How did you bear it," she asked.

"There was but one way," he said. "I studied law and began practice as soon as I came north.

Time, strength, and energy have all been devoted to my profession. I have been a hard worker. I have made a name and a competency. I shall work no longer. I am out of bondage. My profession has been all to me. I have made no friends save such as my business success demanded. I have had no woman for my friend; you cannot know how alone I have been."

They had risen and were walking slowly back to the hotel, and now Marie Thorne spoke as a woman might be expected to speak.

"Why have you not married and made your life less hard and lonely? You might have been happier, I think."

"You do well to say I *might* have been. Do all who marry find happiness?" he demanded. "What had I to hope for from woman's love? Has it ever been aught but a curse to me?"

She turned and shot a half-troubled glance at the face of the man beside her.

"Forgive me," he said penitentially. "I have grown bitter, but I have no need to be a brute. Forgive it, for I came to ask for a few hours of your companionship. I must return to New York soon, and there is much that I should like to know about, which you only can tell me."

That evening, at dinner, Mrs. Thorne went across to the table where sat Mrs. Varney, a widow, and her daughter, who though not as favored by the smiles of fortune as many of the aristocratic guests of the house, were great favorites. Laying down

two tickets for the concert to be given that evening at the opera house, she said pleasantly :

"If you have not yet purchased your tickets for the concert, allow me to present you with mine. Ned has gone boating ; and just this afternoon a gentleman who is an old friend of our family came to see me. He is not musical, not in the smallest way ; and I should not like to ask him to go, and cannot go with courtesy myself. I think the seats are good ones. Ned got them, and he is quite particular as a rule. It would be a pity not to use them, don't you think ?" and smiling she walked away from the thanks of her friends.

The evening was spent by Caleb Harvey and Mrs. Thorne in the deserted parlor. A backgammon-board lay on the table between them, but they forgot to play, and talked until time for the concert to close.

When after several days Harvey returned to New York, Marie Thorne knew that the sentiment of an ideal love, which she had for years shrined in her memory, had been forever banished by the presence of the living, breathing man, and she knew that she did not regret it.

XXIV.

"HOW STANDS THE GREAT ACCOUNT 'TWIXT ME AND VENGEANCE?"

THE dead despair of winter had passed. The chill and frost of early spring had followed fast in its footsteps, and the voices of the school-children sounded shrill in the valley as they played at out-door games once again.

The school, which Margaret Steyne and Mrs. Morgan had determined upon, had after much consultation and planning become a fact. A competent teacher had been found in the daughter of the rector who had been secured to conduct services in the little stone chapel. Through the long winter months the figure of the young mistress of Steyne House had been a familiar sight on the hill-path which led down to the village.

This was the noble work she had found to do for her fellow-man. And what of herself? Was she happy? She had not forgotten, but the first bitterness had passed, the first pages in the story of her life had been turned down. Nothing lifts us out of our own griefs and dispels our petty aims like entering into the lives of others; sharing not alone their sorrows, but their joys, their plans for daily living. This Margaret had done with her whole sympathetic, intelligent nature; and she had been

strengthened and helped by it. Into her own life had come a sweet content. She was stronger physically than she had ever been, because of the outdoor life.

She had brought a blessing on Walsingham, the people said. Their children were in school, and the mine on her land was being opened, which was giving employment to many men and boys ; and rows of new houses were going up with much speed to accommodate the miners who would come to work soon. Such prosperous times had not been known in Walsingham for many years. It was the New Virginia.

One break had come in the long winter. It was when Professor Grey had stopped at Walsingham, on his way North. Margaret had walked down to spend the afternoon with her friend Mrs. Morgan, and was greatly surprised to learn that Mr. Grey was a visitor, having been acquainted with Mrs. Morgan before her marriage. He had arrived but a half-hour before.

Mrs. Morgan promptly announced that Margaret would stay to tea and spend the evening, and they would all walk home with her afterwards. When, therefore, Axem with the dog came to go home with her mistress through the winter sunset, Mrs. Morgan told her that she was to go back, which order the lawless Axem entirely ignored, showing her disapproval of matters generally by perching herself on the gate post, where a half hour later her mistress found her kicking her heels mutinously against the pickets, and sent her home.

It was a long, beautiful evening to Margaret,

Prof. Grey had come direct from Thorne's head-quarters, a small but comfortable village fifty miles away, and everything he talked of was more or less associated with him and his work. Mr. Morgan's questions opened up a mine of interest, and no one of that small group guessed how hungrily one heart gathered up every word which spoke of Thorne. This evening had tided over the long winter for her, and became the epoch whence she found herself dating time and events, backward and forward.

It was springtime again. The April tears would soon cease to fall, and in a fortnight more the school would close for the summer. Through the spring rains Margaret had been kept at home more closely than during the winter months. Now, when the rain-clouds had lifted, and the warm sun had dried the paths, she gladly resumed her almost daily walks to Walsingham.

To-day she had sent Axem on ahead, that she might not be tardy at school, as the morning hours of the school had been given by Margaret to the black children, the afternoons being reserved for the white children exclusively. This was her day to visit the morning session, but she loitered on her way.

It was a morning when you knew a change of seasons had come. The birds sang fit to burst their little throats. The crows flew cawing across the valley, the grass was showing green upon the hills again, and the air brought a sweet scent with it. The sounds of the village came up to her on the hill; the laughter of children, the voices of their mothers as they called after them, the barking of dogs and

the crowing of cocks, all breathing of life and joyousness.

The water in the wide, stony creek was swirling and fretting among the boulders, as it had done when she and Miss Price crossed on the foot-log together almost a year before. It seemed an eternity to her, looking back. She had stopped now on the long bridge and was looking down at the water. There were little side eddies and whirls, making protest against the gray boulders occupying this particular right of way, like some wilful child whose protest is pleasant.

As she stood thus, with the pretty fancies of her brain weaving themselves into rhythm with the sweet minor threnody of the running water, the sound of a horse's feet rang sharply on the stony approach to the bridge. She looked up and the color left her face. It was Thorne. He had seen and recognized her before she was aware of his approach.

He rode on to the bridge, dismounted, and came to her, drawing off the glove from his right hand as he came. His face was haggard and deadly pale. His eyes shone with a strange light, and his mouth was set resolute and firm. His dress was splashed, and his riding boots were covered with mud, showing signs of hard riding. Margaret was shocked.

"Mr. Thorne!" she gasped. "It is you."

"Yes, it is I," he said, a gentle look coming into his eyes. "And I am glad to see you, if only for this one minute;" and he looked at his watch. "The train will be here in five minutes; I must make it."

"What has happened?" she questioned anxiously.

"I do not know just what has happened, nor

what may happen. I have a letter which tells little and yet forebodes everything. I will give it to you; it will explain itself. I know I have your sympathy; and believe me I never needed it as I do now. I thank God for this sight of you and the touch of your hand."

"Is there anything I can do for you?" Margaret asked, the tears springing to her eyes.

"Yes; do not lose faith in me. Believe that I am trying to do what is right. And will you send word to Morgan to get my horse and take care of him? I don't know how long I shall be gone."

"Do not fear that I shall doubt you, dear friend," she said—"and good-bye."

The train had whistled at the crossing below. He wrung her hand and sprang on to his horse, while Margaret stood where he had left her on the bridge, till she saw the train pull out and knew he had gone, gone to meet some great trouble.

"Does the road wind uphill all the way?
Yes, to the very end.
Does the day's journey last the whole long day?
The whole long day, my friend."

She murmured the lines brokenly, bitterly, the heavy lashes weighting down the white lids.

The letter lay in her hand. She turned it over and curiously studied the postmark; she could not look at it yet. She went back up the hill; she could see no one this morning. When she was alone, where no eye could see her, she opened the letter. It was in a scrawling, boyish hand and evidently had been written hurriedly.

"Oh, Uncle Thorne!" it said, "come home at once. I don't know how to tell you, but there's been a man here several times this winter to see Aunt Marie. I didn't know it then, and now people are talking about it. And she gets letters from him. I found one and read it, and he's trying to get her to go away with him somewhere. He said he was a friend of yours and of her people; and folks didn't say anything, 'cause they thought it was so. His name's Harvey. Do you know him at all? He was a lawyer from New York, he said, when he first came here, but this letter I found was from Richmond. Do come as quick as you can, dear uncle. I am nearly wild and I can do nothing. I am so sorry.

"Your loving nephew,

"NED."

Margaret continued to look at the letter, too dazed and shocked to think of but one thing. *This* was Caleb Harvey's revenge. The dastardly scheme was worthy of the man who had planned it, a man whose whole life had been a lie, who had beggared honor to strike at another man's honor.

Margaret's tears fell thick and fast in the hour she spent alone on the hillside; tears that had not flowed for herself were shed freely now for her friend.

Then followed days of wearing suspense, when nothing was heard, when no word could come. Those were days that to Margaret were filled with the keenest agony. It is in such hours that we understand what the poet meant when he wrote:

"Of night impatient we demand the day;
The day arrives, then for the night we pray."

The mails became the dial-points of the days, and the closing days of the school made many demands on Margaret's time to which she was hardly fit to respond. But at last they came to an end; the most diligent had been rewarded; all had done better than she had expected. Axem had won the distinction of being the worst pupil in the school, although, as she expressed it, "Her bones jis' ached fwum bein' good."

But one day there came a paper to Mrs. Morgan, sent by Professor Grey. It had wandered from place to place before being received at the proper office, but almost as soon as it was received it found its way to Steyne House. It contained under flaming headlines, an account of the elopement of a prominent society woman of L—— with a wealthy lawyer of New York City, who had been a former lover of the lady. Mr. Thorne, the husband of the woman, was widely known and highly respected in business and social circles. He was a member of an old Southern family of Louisiana, and was well known in New Orleans. He was South on business at the time, but when a suspicion reached him that the honor of his family was in danger, he had come as fast as steam could carry him, but he was too late. The plot had been well laid. The guilty couple had fled to Europe. He had reached New York, only to find that the steamer had sailed the day before. The sympathy of the public was freely expressed for the husband.

And Margaret and Miss Price, after the tension

of suspense was over, knew that they had feared murder, and had not dared speak of their fears to each other.

Yes, Caleb Harvey had sated his desire for vengeance, and the guilty pair had escaped the wrath of the insulted, wronged husband ; but retribution followed close on their footsteps. Marie Thorne, the erring wife, never saw the land for which she had sailed. Being taken suddenly ill on board the vessel, she died the day they reached land, and was carried ashore only to be laid in a grave on the sunny shores of France.

Thorne, knowing the unscrupulousness of the man into whose hands she had trusted herself, refused to believe the published report. The ship's register would not suffice him. He crossed to France and there satisfied himself that his wife had, as was reported, died on board the steamship.

He made a thorough but fruitless search for Harvey, and then returned to face life in the best way he could, and to no one did he ever speak of the matter. One last message came to him from the dead. When he returned home he found awaiting him a letter from New York. It was from the woman steward of the vessel in which the couple had sailed. It stated that the enclosed letter had been given to her by the dying woman, "with tears and entreaties that it might not fall into the hands of the man we had all thought was her husband," and with a request that she would mail it when the ship returned to New York.

It was a little tear-stained note, but it was in her own handwriting. She was ill, and feared that she

should die, and she wanted him to know that she was sorry now that she had brought this trouble on him.

"I never loved you, Tom; and I thought I did love him, and he made believe that he had never forgotten me. I believe that he loves me now, but not as much as he hates you. But, oh! Tom, if I live or die, do not take his life and bring more trouble on yourself. It is for your sake I ask this. I am not worth it. I have never been a good wife. Forget me and forgive me, if you can.

"MARIE."

The heat of the summer was passing away, when Thorne with his nephew and Professor Grey passed through Walsingham on his way to resume his out-door life. They had stopped only long enough to inspect the new mine and railroad, which were now in operation, and pushed on to the upper end of the line. The company was anxious that he get back to take charge of the work again, and he was ready to go, he said. And the first restful, relieved feeling which came to the hearts of the two women of Steyne House, came with the knowledge that he had given up the search for Caleb Harvey and had taken up his business life again.

Caleb Harvey would never return to America. He must always be a wanderer; for Margaret, when his greatest villainy was made known, had written to Dr. W——, of New Orleans, and had sent the story of Henry Steyne's life, requesting him to give the story in whole as it read, to one of

the reliable newspapers of the city for publication. And it had been published broadcast, and freely copied by the Richmond papers. Caleb Harvey never would face the outburst of honest indignation which followed the reading of the story. His own life was his retribution.

XXV.

ARCADIA.

"Where do the roses bloom
All the round year?
Where do the roses bloom?
Tell me, my dear!"
"Only in Arcadie—
Arcadie is here!"

It was past the noontide of a day late in September, that a handsomely appointed carriage could be seen wending its way down the hill from Steyne House. The golden sun burnished each strap and buckle of the harness till the silver mounting threw back fierce rays of light as the blooded horses stepped daintily down the sloping road.

In the driver on the box you recognize a familiar figure, old Gabriel; a trifle grayer and more serious-minded perhaps, but the same simple, straightforward nature looks forth through the benignant face. The only occupant of the carriage is Miss Price, whom Gabriel is driving to the station to meet Margaret, the loved friend and mistress, who after an absence of several months in a Northern state will reach home to-day. Four times has the golden month of September reigned since we last looked upon the inmates of Steyne House, but time touches lightly, as with a magic wand, where content reigns, and Margaret Steyne, with the

joy of home-coming shining in her lovely eyes, seems to have grown fairer with the passing years.

"Ah! it is sweet to be at home," she exclaimed with a sigh of happiness; "I shall never go away again to stay so long."

"But you did not mean to stay so long when you left home," said her friend.

"No, I should have been home a month earlier at least, had not Isabel Morgan written to me when she did of her sister's approaching marriage to Professor Grey, and urged me, as it took place in September, to join her at the old homestead and remain for it."

"You could not well refuse when she was coming home so soon afterward and you could have her company all the way."

"No, though I was ready to come I changed my plans to suit hers. It would have seemed ungracious to do otherwise, and I am glad now that I waited."

"I was really pleased to hear of Mr. Grey's marriage," declared Miss Price, who had never ceased to feel a little sorry for his disappointment. "But is Mrs. Grey much like Mrs. Morgan?"

"Not in the least that I could see. Not so pretty, not so intelligent, nor so genial as Isabel; just a little domestic 'home body,' as you New England people say. But she will take excellent care of her wise, studious husband, which he will appreciate in his own logical way, and soon learn to value her as he does air or bread, or any other necessary thing," said Margaret.

"Then I should think that Isabel Morgan would

have suited him much better," declared Miss Price. "It seems to me that would have been more suitable all round."

Margaret did not answer, but shot an amused glance at Rebecca's back as that lady stepped ahead to open the gate into the yard. Rebecca's ideas on love and marriage always seemed to Margaret to be without rudder or compass.

At the head of the walk, framed in by the lilac bushes, stood old Hagar, smiling and curtseying a welcome to her mistress as she had stood on that morning when Margaret had come a stranger into her own home. It had been her only welcome that day, and she remembered it gratefully even now.

Fortune had been lavish to Margaret in the years since she came into her ancestral home, but riches had not spoiled her rarely sweet nature. She was the same womanly woman that had dreamed in the firelight of Miss Price's humble hearth at Winston.

No, wealth had not spoiled Margaret, nor had it been allowed to spoil the harmonious surroundings of the old home; the picturesque remained, and always should, she said. The house had been painted anew, but in the same shades. The gardens were larger and were well kept by a young man under Gabriel's supervision. The peach orchard had been replanted, and a row of trees, with their graceful, swaying foliage, followed each side of the road on its circuitous trail down the hill—the road which had been widened and graded to a gentle slope, to suit the handsome carriage in which Gabriel delighted to drive his mistress.

As Axem, who as of old missed none of the old man's weaknesses, enviously declared to Miss Price, "Gabe, he so pow'ful top-lofty when he git on dat kerridge, he jis' bow down to hissef."

Margaret's love for her home had something touching in it, it was so sincere and made her so thoughtful for others. One of the first uses to which she had devoted her money and leisure had been to go to New Orleans to pay a visit to Doctor W——, the aged physician who had attended her cousin during his long illness there.

It was the winter following the publication of her cousin's story, which stirred to its depths the social world of the city, so pathetic was the tale of love and tragedy, sorrow and gentle trustfulness, on the one hand, and of remorseless villainy on the other. She had a delightful visit with the cultivated, scholarly old gentleman. They found much to talk of that was of mutual interest in the long drives which they took about the city. Together they visited the scene of the tragedy, and the great cemetery where lay buried her cousin's betrothed, fair Marian Harvey, so cruelly murdered in life's brightest hour. Another day found them beside the humble grave of Caleb Harvey's victim, unhappy Mercedes La Clere, the young Acadian girl.

"Poor erring child!" said Margaret sadly, "there must be somewhere an avenger of innocence to plead the cause of such as you."

When Margaret had left Dr. W——, it was with the promise of a visit from him when he should feel that he was able to endure the journey. And what is so dear to the heart of the aged

as something to look forward to, something in the future?

The sun was shining dully from beneath horizontal clouds, and in the red reflected light Margaret went with lingering steps across the upland pasture lot. The earth was dry with the dryness that comes before the change of the season. The tender blades had been cropped and the stems of the joint-grass crackled to the foot like stubble. The mullen, loving the fierce kiss of the sun, towered sentinel-like over the lower plant life of the field, with its mass of fuzzy, unsatisfactory bloom; and the bursting blossom of the milkweed, white as snow and soft as wool to the touch, silvered the air; the heat was setting it free. Everywhere was nature with loving palm-touches moulding all things for the sterner season to come.

The old trysting-place under the spreading beech which her feet sought to-day was full of heart memories to Margaret.

> "Here had she prayed when temptation assailed,
> Risen up, turned away, not having failed;
> Here friendship met her with outstretched palm,
> And sweet fell the benison of nature's calm."

How little do things change after all, she was thinking, for as of old Axem and Rolfe had followed their mistress and lay on the grass near her, where presently, finding the bright eyes of the little maid fixed upon her, her mistress spoke.

"What is it, Axem?" she asked kindly.

"I's glad t' hab yo back agin," she said; and the manner expressed all she could not say, for Axem

rarely spoke of her own feelings; they rather found expression through a dog-like devotion and watchfulness.

"Was it lonely for you?"

"Monst'us lonesum, do' Hagah she bin s'prisin' good sens she dun 'bolish de idols out'n hers hawt," she added generously.

"What idols has she abolished?" asked her mistress, smiling a little.

"De geese; dey's dun gone."

"Gone?" she asked incredulously.

"Yes, dun gone; sol' t' de man what byed 'em."

"How did she come to do it?"

"Jis' coz of de 'stracted meetin' dey bin habin' in Squa' Cranst'n' back fiel'. De niggahs dey all go, 'n de preachin' brer tell 'em 'bout de idols in der hawts; eb'ry niggah, he say, dun hab an idol in de hawt, 'n Satan he gwine ter git eb'ry one an sen' 'em to torment, ef dey don' tek em out. Den Hagah she dun flop up an say she gwine teah de id'ls out'n her hawt. She say she 'spects she dun co'mit sin 'bout dem geese, an' now she gwine ter lay 'em on de altah ob de Lawd. Ole Gabe he dun shout out louder'n de res', 'Glory!' Cos he say he doan' git nuffin' dun, on'y stay in de cawn-fiel' an chunk at dem geese; an' he mighty nigh lose all his 'ligion. He did chunk at dem pow'ful," added the little maid.

Margaret laughed merrily; but Hagar's philosophy was not unusual. As long as the strain was on Gabe's piety her idols had not troubled her; it was when the consequences to herself were made plain that she acted.

Ah ! how like we are after all ! We may claim kinship with the world, for there is a bit of the heathen in us all. Each heart shrines an idol and conceals its idolatry when it can, and when it cannot, palliates and excuses the sin with subtle reasoning. If our idols were suddenly set up in plain view of the world—even our little household world—how many of us would have the courage to go up and claim them ?

In the twilight, when the stars trailed out softly luminous and turned into brilliant points of gold in the gray disk of sky, Margaret sat on the veranda and heard with a thrill of gladness the familiar cry of the owls as they called in the wood. She loved the whole owl family ; loved the sound of their eerie cry and the thought of their wild, free life abroad in the darkness.

She could close her eyes where she sat, and again it was a warm pulsating summer night. The long years had slipped away, and she was a child once more. She heard again the droning languorous throb of the myriad insect life as it beat upon the warm air as she had heard it then, leaning through the window into the purple night. In fancy the musical katydids contended amicably in the old grapevine beneath her window, while the brown crickets chirped cheerily in the long, odorous grass at its roots, and the owls flew lazily from shadow to shadow as they were doing to-night.

Nowhere else did the aroma of the past press upon and envelop her as in this spot and at this hour. But she could not hope for many more of these evenings ; there was coming a chill in the air. It

was the Heimweh, as the Germans call it; yet even now Rebecca came out to warn her that she was imprudent.

"I know it," she answered, "but it is so ineffably sweet to sit here again."

Then Rebecca spoke of what was in her heart. "Have you heard from Mr. Thorne, Margaret?"

She asked the question a little timidly, for they did not often speak of him.

"No, I have not; only as you have heard through Mr. and Mrs. Morgan. Have you seen him?"

"I have seen him but once since he bade us good-bye three years ago, but Mr. Morgan told me this summer that he had gone North to stay. I thought perhaps you had seen him, you seem so happy," she ventured.

"I have not seen him nor heard from him," said Margaret a little sadly. "But I know that wherever he may be, he is living the life of a strong, true man. That is enough. And fate has been good to me, Rebecca. Life is pleasant; I ought to be happy."

"Yes, you ought to be happy," burst out Rebecca warmly. "You deserve to be; you have helped to make so many lives better and sweeter, so many hearts lighter by your unselfish labors and sympathy. I thank my Heavenly Father every day, that your life was not spoiled," she added devoutly.

"No," said Margaret simply, "my life has not been spoiled; only wrongdoing could do that. We cannot always help our loving; that is sometimes beyond us; but we can help doing wrong about it when we know," she said with soft vehemence.

"You mean the strong can."

"Yes, you might put it that way; for a weak man loves weakly and weakly forgets. Love will never sanctify him. With him the impulse to forget is as quick to come as the impulse to love. It is the strong nature that suffers through love," said Margaret.

"And though they suffer, they conquer and grow stronger," said Rebecca softly, looking off through the darkness.

"Yes, they must be strong to endure; the stronger because it must be endurance without hope. They can only hold fast to their belief in the divinity of circumstances, to their faith in human goodness and sympathy, and work; for persistent physical labor, my dear friend, holds more people to the straight path than we know."

"It is God's best gift to his children; I've always said so," declared Miss Price.

"His most merciful and ever-present provision surely, for in all our lives there are duties, not far off, but close, warm and pulsating with human life and sympathy; and sympathy is the heart-beat of the world. If we do not shrink from the duties which reach out to us, but meet them with fidelity and courage, we must be happy. Do you not see that we must? It is life's divine compensation;" and Margaret's bright, earnest face was turned up to her friend.

Rebecca Price spoke no more, but bent down and kissed Margaret's forehead almost reverently and left her.

The evening had grown chill with the darkness. Once again Gabriel laid a fire in the library, and

Margaret had gone in to its warmth and brightness. Once again she watched him sweep up the bits of bark from the hearth, saw him draw the heavy shutters and drop the bolts through the bars, as he had done on the night she remembered so vividly three years before, the night that had changed the whole current of her life, and which would always stand out as the pivotal point of her whole existence. He went out at last and left her alone.

And the flames leapt high. Then a silence fell, for only the cricket had a story to tell.

She heard Gabriel stop in the hall to speak to some one. Then a firm step sounded on the floor, the door opened, and a man came into the room, and closing the door after him, stood looking at her just a moment before he came toward her.

It was Thorne. The strong, spirited face showed clear-cut as a white cameo against the dark-paneled door. The glowing eyes looked into hers again as they had in the past. She saw him, but seemed to have lost the power of speech or motion, and waited for him where she stood within the circle of the firelight.

He came to her with his hand outstretched. Was it something he saw in her eyes that made him drop his hand and put his arms slowly about her, while the dark, impelling eyes searched hungrily, covetously, the sweet face so dear to him?

"Margaret," he said, "I have come to you as a man starving, who has waited long for his happiness. Have I not a right to be happy at last?"

She felt the touch of his breath on her cheek. His face was perilously near hers. She pressed a

little back from him, and looked into his eyes. Then, reaching up her arms she put them round his neck for answer. Clasping her close against his fiercely beating heart, he stooped and kissed the sweet lips once, twice ; then, with a tender caress of the dark hair, he released her and grasped her hand.

"Come out under the stars, I can see no one now. Come quickly," he said with an impatience that was loving.

She stepped to the closet by the fireplace, took down the wrap, and went with him out through the hall and down the steps into the darkness. Not till they had passed through the gate did he loose his clasp of her hand. Then he stooped, and putting the cloak carefully about her shoulders, drew the hood up over her hair

"Just here, dear," he said tenderly, "was where you stood that night, when I came back and found you with dark doubts of me in your heart. Ah ! my darling, I fought a hard battle with myself then to keep from taking you in my arms and telling you how dear you were to me ; that the sound of your voice was the sweetest music this earth held for me, and that I longed with all my strength to protect you and to keep you ever near me. I want you to say something to-night that will forever hallow the spot to me. Tell me you love me. Tell me that just as we stand here."

He had put his arms about her, and she looked into the dark face bent so close to hers.

"I love you, Tom," she said ; "I shall love you to the end of my life ;" and drawing his face down she kissed him.

"Heaven bless you, my love!" and there was a little catch in his voice. "Your kiss has banished the last haunting shadow of doubt and unrest from my heart. I no longer dread a loveless, joyless future. Do you know, dear, what that means to me? No, you cannot!"

There was a passion of feeling in his voice; it was the echo of past suffering, and it tortured her.

"May the future bring you all the blessings your heart can contain! You deserve them all, dear," she said. "Yet, Tom, your joy cannot outweigh mine when I remember that I shall never again be alone in the world. I shall have you. You belong to me; you will always belong to me." And there were tears in the dark eyes now which the heavy lashes could not keep back.

"While life endures," he exclaimed with a joy that was worshipful. "Never forget for one moment that my heart is your home, that my arms are your shelter and refuge, as they were meant to be."

And he held her close, and kissed away her tears. Then releasing her he took her hand, drew it through his arm, pressing it close against his side, and they walked on the silent hill under the stars.

"We will tell Miss Price to-night that we shall be married very soon," Thorne was saying.

"But she may object," said Margaret.

"Will she?" he said, and laughed softly.

THE END.

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